OTHER WORLDS

Complete NOVEL 69,000 words

APRIL, 1953

35¢

24,000 ADDED WORDS IN THIS ISSUE!

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The People Who Make OTHER WORLDS

No. 12

DAVID V. REED

WHEN we asked Mr. Reed (whose real name is David Vern) to do us 500 words for this issue, and to send us a photograph, he wrote us a 1200 word letter telling us he didn't have time to do 500 words. We'll quote some of his reasons:

"Dear Ray: The news from Brooklyn is more confusion and less time: because I was competing for one of the writing jobs on CBS-TV's Red Buttons Show (I got the job, making life at once both exhilarating and impossible—I have two other jobs, one of them rather formidable, and I subsist largely on dexedrine).

"So here's some news: I spent two seasons as one of the writers on the Sam Levenson Show. I wrote a lovely little satire on science fiction for Howard Browne, but he won't publish it until I give him the ending for another story of mine (you can see he still suffers from Palmer Complaint). The trouble is the ending I had for it really stinks, and I'm stuck for any other way out. (So is Howard—*Rap*). Meanwhile I'm afraid to walk on Madison Avenue, with CBS some four blocks from Howard's office. Last summer I did the audition script for a projected show you would have liked—John Carradine doing dramatized readings of stories of the supernatural. Two years ago I wrote the scenario for a VFW anti-communist film. (Did I tell you I wrote the frame story for Hans Richter's surrealist film "Dreams That Money Can Buy"? It won first prize at the Venice Festival some years ago.) I had a good story in *Good Housekeeping* about a year or so ago. I hope this helps you, *Dave.*"

Sure it helps. But one thing it does not help—as I write this, your picture still hasn't arrived. Nor do I have one in my files. We must have a picture to run with this feature. Therefore, if one does not arrive, we will have to decorate this page with something as appropriate as possible. Perhaps a nude of Marilyn Munroe?

But to add what you forgot, Dave, you began writing science fiction back in

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OTHER WORLDS

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....Editorial...

THIS is probably the most unusual issue of OTHER WORLDS ever put out. Behind it lie several very intriguing stories; but the story behind the 69,000 word novel which is published complete in one issue, making it the longest novel to be thus published in any science fiction magazine since the heyday of the Ziff-Davis 320-page *Amazing Stories;* is the strangest story in this editor's experience—and that experience goes back to 1926!

We've been an editor since 1938, and a publisher since 1949. And we've worked on this novel since 1945! Yes, from the first day we heard the word *Myshkin,* to its appearance in this issue, *seven years* have lapsed. Maybe we'd better tell the story from the beginning, even though it may be a story that shouldn't be told, because it reveals some very interesting editorial secrets. But since we've never had any secrets we were afraid other editors would steal, why worry about this one? The real reason for non-worry, of course, is that *Myshkin* could never be duplicated—at least by a science-fiction editor in his right mind!

We were insane to consider *Myshkin* in the first place. It is insane to consider David V. Reed at *any* time. David V. Reed is not his name—it's really David Vern. David Vern is a legend with us, and with a few other science fiction editors. He is also a pain in the neck and sundry other regions. He is also one of the most loved gentlemen in the field. He is, lastly, one great big goddamed genius.

In this little expose, we're going to expose both David Vern and ourselves. We're going to tell of a relationship almost incredible in magazine publishing—a relationship between an author and a publisher and an editor which is unrivaled for sheer idiocy, and yet for sheer brilliancy of results. For an editor to do what we did, just to get a story, he would have to be a complete fool. We were that fool. But for the first time in our life, we are proud of the title. For out of it came *Myshkin,* and no matter what else came out of it, including an almost irresistible temptation to slash our wrists (but not until we had slashed David Vern's throat!), it was magnificently worth it.

Let's go back to *Where Is Roger Davis?* That's the title of the first story Dave ever submitted to us. Naturally we bought and published it. An anthology expert backed up our judgment by selecting it for a collection, in the days when such collections were few and far between. Your story had to be good to be even considered—and terrific to be accepted. Buying that story led to meeting Mr. Vern. And meeting his lovely wife, Rene. Rene is the kind of Brooklynite angel who throws her arms around your neck and kisses you. And means it. She kissed us that way. We've never had a firmer friend than she. And she had to be firm, to stand up under the privation and tribulation of being married to a real live genius. We think maybe she's responsible for the fact that such brilliant science fiction novels as *Empire of Jegga,* which ran 102,500 words, *Murder In Space, The Man Who Was Five Men,* and so on were actually written.

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Why? Because David Vern is a real sharpie. He throws himself wholly into the arms of the unfortunate editor, holes up in a hotel, writes 20,000 words a day —*and tears it all up!* Meanwhile you scream—for two reasons. First, the 20,000 words were *magnificent.* Second, you are receiving the hotel bills, plus demands for $500.00 a week to support Rene (which he hardly ever sent her—that is, not the whole $500.00). After a month of this, you are at wits' end (and money's end—even if you are backed by a ten-million-dollar publisher). And what do you get? 92,000 words of an *uncompleted* story — plus the cheery news that Mr. Vern is well into his *first* 50,000 words of a *new* story. What happens? You guessed it. This genius NEVER returns to the incomplete 92,000 word story which has such a complex plot that no other human being could fathom what the ending would be. The editor, the world's biggest fool for tampering with the world's strangest genius, has only one recourse—finish the story himself.

Well, many of you will remember *Empire of Jegga.* Be it known that the last 10,500 words were written by your editor, and represent the toughest job of writing he ever did! And when we informed Mr. Vern of what we had done, and that the GIRL was the *real* Ho-Ghan (the unknown ruler whose identity was secret throughout the story) he promptly threw the biggest fit in history—because for 92,000 words, he had aimed at somebody entirely different, with literally hundreds of carefully laid clues and items that would later make it impossible to mistake the real Ho-Ghan. To this day, nobody has questioned our analysis!

We weren't through with being a fool, however. We did it again! We accumulated *two-hundred-ninety-five-thousand* words, all *unfinished,* being the middles, ends and beginnings of assorted stories known as *Mekko, Circus In Time* and *Myshkin.* Out of this welter, and $5000.00, came, at last, 69,000 words of *Myshkin,* with THE END on the last page. But we were in it too deep. There was no way out. We'd be fired if it was known we'd spent $5000.00 for *one* story. when our budget for a whole issue was only $1800.00! So we surrendered David Vern into the hands of his almost distracted wife, who loves him very much, and cursed the day we were born. Why we ourselves still love him to this day is a mystery we'll never understand. Maybe it's his personality. He's such a grand guy. Such an unpredictable guy. Such an irresponsible guy. Such a wonderful writer. And such a jerk!

The story was never published. *Amazing Stories* shrank in pages until the story was too big for its britches. It lay in a file, accumulating dust—until we met Howard Browne at the Tenth World Science Fiction Convention. Howard was the inheritor of our gigantic white elephant. He had $5000.00 tied up in it. And like the good friend of ours that he really is, he solved both our problems. He sold us the story, wrote off the balance (how much?—do you think we'd tell you *that!*), delivered it to us together with the original Henry Sharp illustrations which had been gathering dust along with the manuscript—and this month we give it to you.

We didn't have space either. But we did make space—we reduced the size of our type for this one issue. We crowded an extra 25,000 words into this issue. And to help pay the terrific cost ($128.00), we wrote a 12,000 word story of our own, titled *New Moon,* which is written around one of the finest covers Robert Gibson Jones has ever painted. And for the third time in our lives, we have played the fool—for, it is idiotic

(Continued on page 35)

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Astronomers could hardly believe their eyes or their instruments when the Moon blossomed into a tropical paradise almost overnight. Professor Pickersgill knew the answer—and he also knew what he intended to do about it.

NEW MOON

By R. A. Palmer

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

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This is a story of 1967. It is fiction, yet it may well come to pass. Two scientific factors exist today by which this fiction may be brought to reality: 1) by a study of varves (layers of annual deposit of sediment in the bottoms of certain lakes) it is possible to determine the sequence of dry and wet periods in the Earth's weather, and to note a repetitive pattern which indicates we can predict such periods in the future with reasonable accuracy; 2) atomic energy and rocket science already point the way toward a voyage to the moon. According to varve calculations, the most serious drought in centuries will visit us in 1966; and according to rocket scientists, work is already going forward on a space station, and then an attempt to reach the moon. This story, fiction now, may well prove historical in fifteen years!

THE EDITORS

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THE sound of the shot came into the house even above the keening noise of the wind and the harsh sussuration of blown sand scraping against the now paintless boards of the west wall of the building. The young woman in the living room of the farmhouse stiffened visibly, and the inevitable dustcloth in her clenched fingers trembled with her emotion.

"Oh, Peter," she whispered, "our last cow . . ." A sob came from her lips and she began dusting even more vigorously. Her rapid motions raised a cloud of stifling particles that floated in the air like a dry mist of death. She choked, stopped her quickened motions.

She stamped her foot. "Oh! It's so useless! Dust, dust—nothing but dust! In the food, in the water, in our teeth."

With a sigh she put the dustcloth away. But on her face there remained a look of grim resentment; a look that said plainly that before now it had been accompanied by bitter words, by outspoken complaint against the dusky fate that was sweeping across the plains outside. Now, however, there was beginning to be a look of beaten acceptance, of resignation, of complete loss of hope with which angry words were not in keeping.

She went to the dingy window and looked out. The horizon was near, a rolling pall of brownish black, cutting down visibility to a matter of less than a quarter of a mile. In the yard a thorny rosebush whipped in the wind, a few dried leaves still clinging to it. Above it the gaunt limbs of the great elm that had shaded the house etched photographically potent arms against the tragic sky. The ditch between the yard and the road was filled with curiously wind-rippled powdery dust which seemed to preclude that water would ever again run in its formerly grass-lined excavation. Over in the corner of the yard the stone fireplace, where she and Peter had often roasted "wienies," protruded like a shipwreck from drifted sand, blackened sticks of the last fire rising from it like burnt spars.

Across the road, barely visible in the dust cloud, the boarded windows of the Jensen house stared at her bleakly. The Jensens had already gone; his wife weeping, their two children wide-eyed and dirty cheeked from the interminable dust, Jensen himself shaking his fist at the coppery sky.

"Don't know why I boarded up the windows," he had shouted. "The Devil take the hull of it—I'm never comin' back!" And he had driven off in his ramshackle car, squint-eyed and savagely ferocious.

Tears grew in her eyes at the remembrance. Jensen had been so bitter. It had preyed on her; so that she had tried not to be bitter too. But it was hard. She had tried to hope. Daily she had looked at the skies, praying for rain. Daily—for more than a hundred days. And each day the sun had come up sullenly red through the dust, turned to glowing copper in the zenith, and settled once more in murky red gold in the west; dry, harsh, fiery, implacable.

Now there was no hope. Even if it poured for days, until the land became a sea, it was hopeless. There was nothing left. No livestock, no feed, no money, no *topsoil*. That was the bitterest part of it. No matter what happened now, this was a desert. It was a waste of sand, of unproductive silicon, of gritty grains of sterility. Nothing would grow here for decades, if ever.

When she and Peter had settled here, staking their every penny on their future, investing cash and credit to the limit, they had had bright hope. They were in it deep, they had admitted, but they were living amidst a potential paradise. They would make out, they knew.

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They'd make a living—and a continually better living, until they had established the security they desired so eagerly—security for the children they had wanted to have . . .

A wave of nausea swept over her, and she moved from the window, lay down on the couch. She lay for a moment, then went on remembering, her eyes wide on the ceiling, watching dust motes drifting idly through a shaft of light from one of the windows.

Independence, self-reliance, satisfaction at a life well lived, success in the simple, honest way in which success is truly noble. No shameful dependence on society, no demanding an easy living of a misguided government, no trust in an illusory social security that had its foundation in an economical setup that inflated with the wind, became valueless with the pressure of years of mounting social burdens pyramided by unforeseen population growth.

She and Peter had seen it only too clearly. They had seen their parents deluded. Peter's father had died depending on his son—and it had been a burden he had not shirked. But her father had died a ward of the State, miserable, crushed, ashamed. He had been too ashamed even to face his daughter in the hour of his death. He had died alone.

They had determined that they would have none of it. They had determined that they would do their suffering in dire poverty in their youths, in a desperate attempt to care for themselves in their later years. They had set for themselves a standard of living far below that of their friends, who had been aghast, outrightly disapproving, as they had migrated into that their friends termed a "wilderness."

No, they had nothing. No television, no car, no insurance, no social security, no job, no personal property. No salary, no provision for tomorrow, no registration number. They had not put in the necessary years of paying into the fund that was to insure their participation in the future benefits of society. They had not even begun. They had turned their beginning capital, every cent of their paltry $2,356.81 into a bit of land far off the main road, built the house with their hands and the scrubby timber on the land, lived off the food they grew themselves, and returned every cent they realized from sales of surplus back into obligations and improvements. And they had begun to see enough progress to realize that they were going to make it. They were self-supporting, and barring serious accident, were going to continue self-supporting.

And then had come the drought.

The wheat crop had been good. Half of it had paid off most of their remaining debts. The other half was safely in storage. But then, with advancing summer, the skies had remained a sunny blue. June, July, August heat had grown. Corn had withered, burned brown in the sun. The garden had vanished, bit by bit, in spite of laborious carrying of water from the creek a half-mile away. Then the creek had dried up. The well went next, yielding up no more than a few gallons with each attempt. Their best cow died in the heat. . . .

Wearily she stopped thinking, lay with eyes closed.

The sounds Peter made at the back door as he came in wakened her. It was getting dark, and obviously she had slept several hours. She sat up, watched him as he came into the room. He put the rifle down in the corner, walked to the mantelpiece and placed an empty cartridge on it.

"Six hundred dollars!" he said bitterly.

"Peter . . ." she said.

He crossed over and sat beside her.

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"Mary, that miserable piece of brass represents the six hundred dollars we paid for Yuletide, our last cow. With nothing to feed her, no water to drink, and no place to sell her, it was a bullet or nothing at all. At least we can eat her—with this infernal wind, one thing we aren't lacking is electricity to keep the freezer going."

She laid a hand on his arm. "We've got enough to live through the winter. In the spring we'll start over . . ."

"You know we won't," he said. "Not here. We're going back to town . . ."

"No, Peter!"

"Yes! It's the only thing we can do. In the spring there'll be one more—maybe we can work to give him the chance we've missed out on . . ."

"Peter, listen . . ." She held up her hand.

"What is it?"

"The wind," she said. "I don't hear it."

"It's died down," he admitted. "The dust is settling. How about taking a little walk for a breath of fresh air?"

She nodded, got to her feet.

They went outside. Out on the road, they walked silently through the dusk and the dust toward the hill. Above, a few stars were sparkling through, and low on the eastern horizon there was a soft reddish-yellow glare.

"What is that, a fire?" she pointed.

"No," he said. "It's the moon coming up. Let's watch it rise from the hill."

Reaching the top of the hill, they left the road and climbed up on several large rocks, swept clean of dust by the wind. For a half-hour they watched as a giant amber disk climbed through the dust cloud that still obscured the lower horizon, gradually reducing in size as it rose. Finally it reached the clear sky, and turned a pale green color that grew more intense as the moments passed.

"It's getting so green . . ." said Mary wonderingly.

Peter stared at it a long moment, and as he stared, the green color continued to intensify. He uttered an angry exclamation.

"Even the moon is mocking us!" he said. "Green as spring in Ireland—and around us . . ." he waved a hand, ". . . not even a blade of grass!"

"Maybe it's a sign . . ." she said hesitantly.

"Rot!" he said. "You know better than that. The only sign it can mean to us is that I'm going into town in the morning and look for a job. When I've got one, we'll move back . . ."

He looked up at the strangely green moon and his lips were tight. Beside him Mary's were not so tight. She was sobbing softly.

* * *

THE moon turned green all over the world that night. And telescopes in every observatory turned upon it. Wonder grew in scientific minds, to an even greater pitch than superstition grew in untrained minds. Wonder and consuming curiosity and not a little perturbation. What was happening out there in space? Or was it in space at all, but in our own atmosphere? And if so, what did it mean? Was it a menace—some deadly gas that had entered our air envelope from space, and would eventually find its way to the surface and bring asphyxiating death?

But the wonder really grew when the great telescope at Palomar was finally turned on the brilliant green orb, picking out its details as they had never been picked out before. When the strange things revealed in the telescope were identified, spectroscopes were called into service, and the story they told caused eyes to go wide with amazement. And then the spectroscopes were trained on other bodies in space, and on empty space itself. With the suddenness of a

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military order, secrecy was clamped down on Palomar, and no news went out. And in fact, it *was* a military order. For it was going to rain on Earth. As the High Brass in Washington whispered to one another: "We must prevent a panic among the people!"

A panic? Because it was going to rain?

* * *

PROFESSOR Donald L. Pickersgill was an astronomer. More than that, he was head astronomer at Palomar. More than that, he had made some of the most sensational discoveries of the past ten years in astronomy, and in fact, the most important discoveries of all time in the field of astronomy—and of physics. It was strange that an astronomer should contribute so much to physics, but it was the very nature of his discoveries that made them of such physical importance. The lessons they taught revolutionized the world of physics.

For instance, they had made possible the space station that had just been completed by the United States. The space station by means of which the threat of world war between the Soviet and the Americas had been forever averted. Seventeen hundred miles out from Earth the huge artificial satellite floated on an orbit that circled the Earth in a tight circle high above the north pole, making its complete voyage around the Earth every four hours. Thus, because of its small orbit, every portion of the Earth's land masses except Australia and Antarctica came under its almost continual surveillance. And it was invincible. It could H-bomb any point on Earth with absolute accuracy; it could send out its jets to shoot down any cumbersome Earth-based attempt at setting up another satellite. It was absolute master of all it surveyed, nor could its position be challenged.

Yet, Professor Pickersgill, who had discovered the factors concerning the upper atmosphere which had made the space station possible, (for the satellite, even though seventeen hundred miles out, was nevertheless still within the technical limits of the atmosphere) had also placed an upper limit upon its influence. Beyond the five-thousand-mile mark, not even its rockets could go. They did not *try* to go there, any more —because they never came back. Nor did they ever arrive at their destination —they became "lost" in emptiness, and the best instruments of science could not trace them from the moment they disappeared. Professor Pickersgill had told them why.

And that why was a secret. Military orders had made it so. And because of that order, Professor Pickersgill had lost the freedom of research that had been his. His talents had been impressed into government research, exclusive of all else.

Thus it was that Professor Pickersgill found and kept a secret of his own. It was not a military secret. It could have no value as a military secret. It was not "physical" in the sense of atoms and electrons and cosmic particles. It was theory, only, but insofar as Professor Pickersgill was concerned, it was fact. Fact that could not be proved by physical standards, because it was outside the realm of those standards. It was, basically, the secret of life. Professor Pickersgill had a theory about life. And about death.

Professor Pickersgill had discovered something about outer space that had spelled Death! He had proved that part of it to the military. They no longer tried to venture into that area of certain annihilation. But when he had been impressed into service in further studies in an effort to overcome the apparent

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finality of the discovery that had become the top secret of all time, he had not told them of his theory about life. There were some things, Professor Pickersgill believed, that Man should not know. And according to his theory, his work from this day on was futile. Only he knew enough to admit that what he was working on was impossible to achieve. Yet he worked on it, because there was nothing else he could do.

Now, tonight, his own secret had come to fruit. The moon had turned green! And only he knew *why!* Oh yes—he had told the government that it was a vast cloud of atmospheric and water vapors that had drifted in from outer space, and had now engulfed the moon. Or rather, the moon had gulped most of it in to itself. A portion of it had been captured by the Earth also, and it was this portion that had caused the military decision to keep the discoveries of Palomar secret—to prevent a panic. That portion was going to make it rain on Earth—but such a rain as had never been seen before by Man except during the biblical Deluge. That Deluge, Professor Pickersgill had told the military, had undoubtedly been caused by just such an occurrence as had now come to pass, except that this time the moon had intervened and would probably therefore prevent a world catastrophe such as the original Deluge. But just how much water would fall no one could tell—yet. Conceivably it might be enough only to end the great world-wide drought.

But on the moon, said Professor Pickersgill, it had rained *hard.*

Professor Pickersgill's secret had led to another, and this one had been made known to him by the spectroscope. The results of his observations had left him trembling with excitement, and with the growing plan. Here was the chance of a lifetime—no, the chance of eternity. It might never come again, and yet, under military control, it would be wasted. Still, his only hope was military assistance—and the space station. So, he had gone to Washington, to the Pentagon, and laid his case before them.

"Give me your best rocket, let me make the trip personally with a picked staff of experts—and I will solve the problem you have set upon me!"

They had jumped at the chance. But . . .

"No," he had said. "There will be no room for military personnel, except those with the scientific training required to be of assistance to me. I will have to ask to be the final word in their selection."

They had agreed to that.

Perhaps they would not have done so, had they known of the advertisement that was to appear anonymously in the papers the next day. Even if they saw it then, however, they attached no significance to it. Nor did Peter—except that it was a possibility for a job.

He answered it immediately.

* * *

THE helicopter circled the farm once, then settled slowly toward the front yard. Mary, inside the house, heard the beat of its big rotors and came out to stare upward in amazement. From the first moment she saw it she knew that it was going to land beside her. And as it dropped lower, she saw Peter waving to her from it. Eyes wide, she waved back, speechless.

When the craft had landed, and Peter had jumped from it and embraced her, she said: "Peter! You left to get a job in the city, and you come flying home in a helicopter. What is wrong?"

"Wrong? Does that mean anything is wrong?"

"You haven't been arrested . . .?"

"Arrested! What a thought. And if I

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had been, would I be here, in our front yard, with a helicopter pilot chauffeuring me?"

"Then what . . .?"

"I've got a job! A job that may mean regaining all we've lost—and more!"

"Oh Peter!"

"I can't tell you all about it now," he said, casting a warning glance back at the helicopter, which sat with rotors idling, its pilot sitting in his seat, smoking a cigarette. "He's waiting—for us."

"For—us?"

"Yes. You've got a job too! This job is for both of us."

"Me—a job? But what can I do . . .?"

"Never mind—you can do it. Right now, grab just what you'll need for a few days, and leave the rest. We won't need it, where we're going."

For a long moment Mary looked at his excited face, at the waiting helicopter, then she kissed him. "Why not?" she said brightly. "There's nothing here for us, that's sure! But I can't imagine."

"Don't try," he said. "Just get your things and let's go."

She went into the house while he stood looking about at the bleak desolateness of the acres that had been their pride and hope. In his eyes there was an eagerness, but at the same time it was tempered with seriousness. Perhaps an even more serious mein than he had worn when they had deserted the city to "pioneer" here in this comparative wasteland.

Then Mary came out, a small bag in her hand, her purse in the other, and an equally serious look on her face. Without a word she climbed into the helicopter and took her seat behind the pilot, who acknowledged Peter's introduction with a vigorous handshake and a smile.

"Ever been up before?" he asked.

"Not in a helicopter," she said.

"You'll like it," he promised, and turned to the controls. In a moment the rotors speeded up and the air beat around the ship. Then it lifted slowly into the air, angled off toward the west, and climbed as it went.

"Where are we going?" asked Mary.

"Mount Palomar," said Peter. "That's where we'll work—for a few days."

"And then?"

He shrugged. "We'll see when the time comes. I really don't know."

* * *

THE time came when they faced Professor Pickersgill in his private office at the observatory, two days later.

"I'm satisfied with you both," he said finally, after examining a sheaf of papers on his desk. "I suppose Peter has told you that I have a job, a sort of pioneering job, and that a home of your own and land of your own goes with it?"

Mary nodded. "He has, but it seems so impossible. What job could we possibly do that would be worth such payment?"

"It's quite a dangerous job," said the Professor. "It will be real pioneering. I'll tell you about it now. You are to be part of an expedition, of which I will also be a member, in a rocket ship which will go out to the five-thousand mile limit."

Mary sat erect, looking at Peter. He frowned momentarily, then looked at her and smiled. "The Professor told me there'd be no great danger in the job, although I hadn't dreamed it would be a trip into space."

"No, there's no real danger," said Pickersgill. "Not inside the five-thousand mile limit. That trip has been made many times, and I am sure both of you know why it is the limit?"

Peter nodded. "Something to do with the Earth's electromagnetic field. Any object that passes the limit — well, something happens to it, and it never

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comes back; isn't that it?"

"Literally, yes. What happens to it is . . . unknown. That is, it is unknown to everybody but me. I have a theory about it . . . But that isn't what we are concerned with. We are not going to go beyond the limit as it now exists. We shall be perfectly safe. But I am sure that we will make an amazing discovery which will give all of us everything we have ever wanted."

"Why have you picked us, Professor Pickersgill?" asked Mary. "We aren't scientists. We aren't even good citizens. We are agricultural rebels, off on a wild goose chase to achieve an independence the drought has robbed us of. Of what possible help can we be to you on such an expedition except as dead weight, as sight-seeing passengers?"

The Professor looked at her shrewdly. "You just said you were agriculturists," he said.

"Yes. But what good is agriculture in a rocket ship?"

"None. But be assured that being an agriculturist is a positive requirement for participants of this expedition."

"I just don't understand," she said.

"No, I hardly expected you to. But that is because I am being so high-handed in being very vague as to your duties on this expedition. I am being so of necessity, believe me. But you know the reward, and you also know that there is little danger. Certainly no more danger than in remaining on your drought-devastated farm. Further, you can withdraw now, if you wish, and nothing further will be said. That is partly the purpose of this interview. If you wish to withdraw, you may do so now. If you decide to go through with the trip on the rocket ship, your choice will be irrevocable—and when you have made that choice I will tell you more of your duties, and more of your reward."

Peter looked at him steadily. "Suppose that we decide right now that we're going with you? How does that make it irrevocable? Why couldn't we just refuse to go after you've told us more?"

For a long minute the Professor looked at them both. They met his grave stare with a stare equally as grave, but filled with a curiosity that was rapidly becoming all-consuming. At length he smiled slightly at them. "It will be irrevocable because you will have given me your word, and I feel somehow that you are not the type of persons to go back on your word. Other than that, I can see no other compulsion. You would not be incarcerated; you would not be under surveillance—there would only be your honor and honesty to bind you to your bargain. But . . ." and he looked at them very seriously, "even if some good reason prevented you from keeping your bargain to go on the rocket ship, I know you would not divulge what I have told you nor what I shall tell you—until one week after the rocket ship has left on its trip."

"That you could depend on," said Mary, speaking for both of them.

He looked at her. "Well . . .?"

Peter looked at her also. Finding both their eyes upon her, Mary grew very sober. Then suddenly she brightened and almost laughed at them both. "If either of you think I'd say no to a home of our own and land to live upon independently, you're very poor judges of a woman's mind and heart. Certainly we'll go, if Peter thinks it the thing to do."

"Ah!" said the Professor. "The dutiful wife! That leaves it up to you, Peter."

"She's not so dutiful," said Peter wryly. "She's a good enough judge of *my* mind and heart to know that her happiness is my only concern. Of course the answer is—we'll go!"

"All three of you, eh?" said the Professor.

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Mary stiffened in astonishment. "How did you know?" she asked.

Professor Pickersgill indicated the sheaf of papers on his desk. "Your doctor," he said. "I had you both thoroughly investigated. Besides, I am a very observing old man—I've been peeking at things all my life. My wife used to say to me that I could tell when she was pregnant even before she knew."

"Your wife . . .?"

"Yes. She died a long time ago. And all four of my sons, and my daughter, were killed in the last war."

"Oh . . .!" Mary said in a small voice.

"Perhaps that is one of the reasons I selected you two as part of my expedition. For you see, it is *my* expedition, and not that of the government, as you may have supposed by now, knowing my position. And yet, it *is* a governmental project. It will be one—until we land on the moon!"

Peter jumped to his feet. "The moon!"

"Exactly."

"But . . . that's impossible! The five-thousand mile limit. The electro-magnetic field . . ."

"I'll have to explain," said Professor Pickersgill. "No doubt you've seen the moon these last three nights—how it has turned green?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's because a vast cloud of atmospheric and water vapor has come out of space, and has engulfed the moon. It has rained tremendously there, and the moon has acquired not only water—seas and oceans and rivers—but an atmosphere. A great portion of this cloud from space has been captured, but some of it is at this moment also being captured by the Earth. Within two days it will begin to rain on Earth. There may be quite a deluge. It may even be a catastrophe, but in my opinion, it will not approach such proportions. The atmosphere of the Earth will become slightly heavier, and some areas may become difficult to live in, notably the tropics. Also, land area may be somewhat cut down. But I believe that this will be a rather gradual process if it occurs at all. The main thing about this cloud is that it is in no wise different from Earth's present atmosphere, and that while it engulfs both worlds, passage from one to the other is perfectly possible."

"How is that?" asked Mary.

"It simply means that the added mass will distort the Earth's electro-magnetic field and make it possible to go to the moon because the five-thousand mile limit will be approximately 300,000—for a period of about two weeks. During those two weeks we can travel to the moon, because we will be traveling in atmosphere all the way."

"I see," said Peter. "Then, having explored the moon, and discovered the answer to the problem this expedition is to solve, we will return . . ."

"No."

There was silence in the office. Mary and Peter stared at the astronomer.

"No," he repeated. "We will not be coming back."

"You mean," said Mary in a tight voice, "that the home and land you are offering us is on the Moon?"

"That and the future of free men," said Professor Pickersgill. "But come, let me *show* you before you break your promise—and I confess that if you do, I will not blame you." He rose to his feet and led the way from his office.

Five minutes later they found themselves in the great chamber that housed the Big Eye. And before long, they were taking turns looking at the surface of the moon. Through the giant telescope, the surface could be as plainly seen as their farm had been from the helicopter that had carried them away from it.

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But in sharp contrast to the dust-blown desert that had once been their home and their hope, the surface of the moon was a riot of luxuriant vegetation.

"It's a paradise!" exclaimed Mary. "A perfect paradise."

"You could never come back," said the Professor. "Once the Earth captures the remaining free atmosphere in the cloud, the electro-magnetic barrier will again come into being, perhaps a trifle more than five-thousand miles out from Earth, but there, just the same."

Peter looked at Mary gravely, and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"I want to add," said the professor, "that you aren't the only couple who will go with me on the expedition. Already two other couples have agreed to go, and there will be several more. We will have quite a colony—but as yet, no . . . babies . . . except . . ."

"Ours will be the first, then!" said Mary, a joyous note in her voice. Then in suddenly strange contrast she was in Peter's arms, and both of them were crying. And equally strangely, so was Professor Donald L. Pickersgill.

* * *

They went to the satellite space station in a V-7. Before leaving, they had been briefed once again by Professor Pickersgill.

"There was be five couples," he had told them. One other couple, besides yourselves, are already married. They are Captain and Mrs. Carl Mallon. Captain Mallon is a physicist, and an engineer. His wife is a chemist. I understand the Army rates both very highly. However, these two are the only persons who do not realize that they will not be coming back . . ."

"But . . ." Mary had intervened almost instantly. "Isn't that a very wrong thing to do?"

"It is absolutely necessary. Without some Army personnel aboard, I am sure we could not make this voyage without coming under suspicion. Besides, I have investigated these two very much more thoroughly than has the Army. Not only are they very capable scientists, but they are madly in love with one another. It is because of this fact that I have indulged in a subterfuge for which I am sure God will forgive me. And it is because of the necessity for success that I am going to ask you to become a part of this subterfuge. Let us say that, having reached the moon, it is discovered, both by myself, and with a little suggestion from me, by Captain Mallon, that return has become impossible, is it not conceivable that they will not regard their lot in too bad a light?"

"It's conceivable," Peter had admitted.

"Furthermore," Professor Pickersgill had pointed out, "they have entered upon this venture with the full understanding that the risk is very great, and that it is entirely possible that they may not return. In their case, this has been stressed. They are fully prepared to be lost in space, or even marooned on the moon. They, also, have seen the moon through the telescope. In fact, they looked at it very longingly, and Mrs. Mallon remarked to me it was very beautiful."

Mary had looked at Professor Pickersgill with pursed lips. "I don't know whether you are a very nice old man or a rogue," she had said.

"I will take all the blame," said the astronomer. "I have so arranged it that none of you will meet each other until after we have taken off in the space ship from the station. I have insisted upon this for secrecy, and further, each party is being taken to the station separately and the arrival has been so timed that you will be conducted immediately to your quarters in the ship. Since take-off

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will be one-half hour after your arrival, there will be no time for even casual meetings. You will be required to be strapped in your take-off bunks until peak velocity has been attained."

"Then why did you tell us about the Mallon's now?"

"Because I wanted you to know, and because I never want the Mallon's to know I tricked them. I do have a conscience . . ."

"Getting away with it won't let you sleep any better," Mary had said.

He had smiled. "Sometimes there are other ways than words to express a meaning, and because of that, I feel certain that there will be little to weigh upon my conscience once the need is done."

The trip to the space station had taken only a short hour, and they had been led immediately by a military escort to the cradle where the space ship rested, its slim nose pointing directly away from the Earth. Slim though it appeared, it was a gigantic thing.

"Mostly motors," Peter said as they climbed up a steel ladder in the base of the ship.

They followed the guard to a tiny cubicle which contained two upright "bunks" into which they were strapped, still standing.

"Will we ride this way?" asked Mary.

The guard grinned. "You'll think you're riding a lot of ways before you get out of this thing," he said. "The ship doesn't take off in perpendicular. We lower it into a launching cradle, but this is normal landing position, and therefore the bunks are perpendicular now."

After the guard left them, they were alone in their cubicle. They waited in silence. Finally Mary's voice came softly.

"Peter . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"Do you really thing the government is that stupid?"

"How do you mean?" asked Peter, startled.

"To place all their eggs in one basket? After all, solving the mystery of the electro-magnetic barrier is of prime importance to them. The space station is only the first link in what they hoped would be a chain of links to the planets and eventually the stars. The military mind is never satisfied except by more conquests . . ."

"You mean the Professor may be outsmarting himself?"

"I . . . I don't know what I mean. But somehow all this seems to be going too smoothly to suit me. It just can't be that we are going to a paradise to live as human beings should live, without any of the opposition we've always had ever since we were children."

"I think you are needlessly dreaming up difficulties," said Peter. "After all, in a little more than a week there will be no more chance to make the trip. It will take us most of that time to get to the moon. After that, no matter what the government thinks, there will be nothing they can do about it."

"I guess you're right," said Mary. "But somehow, I feel a bit uneasy."

"It's just the tension of the trip," said Peter. "You'll feel better once we've actually gotten underway, and can get out of these strait-jackets."

A red light flashed on the wall, and a glowing panel showed the words PREPARE FOR TAKE-OFF AT COUNT OF TEN.

"Oh!" gasped Mary. "Only ten!"

The illuminated panel began to flash:

ONE . . .

"Aren't changing your mind now, are you?" said Peter, almost jokingly.

TWO . . .

"No," said Mary.

THREE . . .

"Peter . . ."

FOUR . . .

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"What?"
FIVE . . . .
"If anything happens . . ."
SIX . . .
"Nothing will!"
SEVEN . . .
"But if it does . . ."
EIGHT . . .
"Professor Pickersgill is the world's top scientist . . ."
NINE . . .
". . . and he knows what he is doing!"
TEN!
"Oh Peter! I love you so very . . ."

Suddenly it seemed as though a giant hand clamped down on her breast, squeezing the breath out of her, and she could no longer speak. Her vision swam, darkened, and—

* * *

SHE became aware that the sign was flashing again. It was saying PEAK VELOCITY ATTAINED. YOU MAY UNFASTEN SAFETY STRAPS.

She fumbled for her straps, found a warm hand closing over her own. It was Peter. "Sissy," he said. "I beat you that time—never even passed out!" He was undoing her straps, and in a moment she sat up in her bunk, which now seemed horizontal.

"Careful," he said. "No gravity. You'll float like a feather."

And she was floating—directly into his arms. "Say, this is nice," he remarked. "You've been saying you'd have to reduce, because of that little tummy of yours—but not much need for it now! I could carry you in my hip pocket." He kissed her.

"Won't gravity on the moon be less than on Earth?" she asked, struggling from his arms and standing beside him.

"Yes, quite a bit."

"What will I weigh?"

He grinned. "Oh, about thirty pounds —plus about something less than two pounds for the baby. It'll be the easiest job of carrying ever before done by an Earthwoman!"

She looked horrified. "Thirty pounds! I'll be skinny as a rail!"

"It doesn't work *that* way," he said. He looked down at her observingly. "Quite the contrary, you'll have the most terrific figure the moon has ever seen!"

"You haven't seen the other women on this trip . . ."

A loud-speaker voice interrupted her. It was obviously that of Professor Pickersgill. "All of you, please, come to the control room in the nose of the ship. Move carefully. There is little gravity."

"Guess we'll see them in a moment," observed Peter. "Hope they are all as good looking as you. As long as we are going to colonize the moon, it might as well be with first-class stock!"

She pinched him with all her strength.

"Ouch!" he yelped, and jumped. His head hit the ceiling. "OUCH!" he yelled again.

She reached up, grasped him by the foot and drew him down, a quasi-penitent look on her face. "If you ever refer to me as 'stock' again," she said, "you'll really have occasion to yell. And no matter how beautiful the other women are, there'll be no 'mooning' around, understand?"

He rubbed his head ruefully. "You're a fine one!" he said. "Who brought the subject up, anyhow?"

"I did. And now, let's go see if they *are* as beautiful as I am."

He followed her to the door, grinning. "If they are, you'll turn as green as the moon," he said.

* * *

THERE were five men and four women in the control room when they arrived. One of them was Professor

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Pickersgill.

"Ah," he said. "Here come Mr. and Mrs. Peter Webb. That completes our little crew." He motioned them forward, and they faced the others curiously. "This," he indicated a couple dressed in military uniforms, "is Ellen and Carl Mallon, our other married couple. Carl is our physicist and Ellen is our chemist."

They shook hands cordially.

Professor Pickersgill led them to the others. "This is John Carson," he indicated a tall, lanky blond man. "He's an agronomist. And this is Cherry Adler, whose profession is dietician. She'll be our cook on the expedition. And I understand John has tasted her cooking before—which may be why he calls her 'Pie' . . ."

The lanky blond agronomist's neck turned red, and Cherry said: "Professor, just for that, I'll put cod-liver oil in *your* pie!" But she smiled and shook hands with Peter and Mary without embarrassment.

They went on down the line. "Dr. Arnold Kaminski, physician and surgeon. Lester Delpre, engineer. Dorothy Zajac, registered nurse. Betty Fine, designer and draftswoman—and also, I understand, a good interior decorator and dress designer, if those added abilities are of interest to you."

Mary looked at the professor covertly as she grasped Betty's hand. "Such abilities are of interest to any woman," she said. "I have often wished I had some ability along those lines myself."

Carl Mallon spoke up. "Professor Pickersgill neglected to mention just what your capabilities were," he said.

Mary looked at Peter, then at Professor Pickersgill, and she smiled slowly. "I'm a housewife, and Peter's a farmer."

Carl looked at her blankly. "A farmer?"

"Yes. We got tired of the city and its ways, and sank our life savings in a farm. It was ruined by the drought, and here we are, working again."

"What were you before you became farmers?"

"Well, I was a sociologist, and Peter was a mathematician. But I wouldn't say either of us were very good at it."

Carl Mallon grinned. "If Professor Pickersgill hired you for this expedition, I'd say that was an understatement."

Professor Pickersgill looked at Mary and smiled. But he said nothing.

Peter turned to the astronomer. "Well, we're on our way, but just where are we now?"

The older man turned to the leaded glass ports. "We can take a look," he said. "And as we look, I'll explain a few things about our expedition."

They crowded around the oval port and looked out. The space beyond was intensely black and filled with brilliant stars, such as none of them had ever seen on Earth. Ahead, and slightly out of view because of the curvature of the ship's nose, was the vividly green moon, appearing almost twice as large as they were accustomed to seeing it.

"We're nearing the five-thousand mile limit—or what was previously the limit," explained the professor. "Actually, as you all know, this limit is now far beyond the moon itself, perhaps as much as 60,000 miles beyond it. We are flying in atmosphere—actually only as dense as our very best laboratory vacuums, but atmosphere nevertheless. I will explain the difference. It is my theory that the Earth is contained in an electromagnetic field which extends some five-thousand miles out into space, and that it is this electro-magnetic field which differentiates the Earth's atmosphere from actual space itself. It is a sort of dividing line which can be likened to the dividing line that makes length different from breadth and both of them different

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from thickness. In short, it could be termed the fourth dimension which differentiates what we call 'space' from the three dimensions which make up matter. No matter if my theory is correct, prior to this expedition, no rocket ship has ever penetrated that mysterious barrier and retained its original three dimensions. By that I mean that to all intents and purposes, it either loses or changes its original three dimensions, and thus disappears from all possible scientific ken. We cannot detect it visually, by electronic means such as radar, or by any other method of detection of matter known to us."

"You said you had a theory about it?" asked Peter.

"Yes, I have. But . . ." the professor shrugged. ". . . I won't go into it right now. Suffice it to say that up to now, any ship that has gone as far as we now have, has vanished completely, never to reappear."

Dorothy Zajac let out a startled exclamation. "We've *already* passed the five-thousand mile limit?"

"Yes. And as you can see, we have not disappeared."

"How do you know we haven't?" asked Mary.

"Because if you'll look back, you'll see that you can still see the Earth. If we had vanished, we would be in no better position to receive light rays from Earth than Earth would be to receive them from us."

They crowded to the window and looked around its lower edge. The Earth filled most of the visible horizon.

"Why it's green, just like the moon, only not so intense!" said Cherry.

"Yes. As a matter of fact, the Earth has always appeared slightly green from observers inside the five-thousand mile limit. Right now it is greener than it ever was, because the Earth is capturing a tremendous volume of additional atmosphere and water vapor. Before this process is finished, the total volume of the cloud from space which has not already been captured by the moon, will expand the volume of Earth's atmosphere to almost double what it originally was. When stabilization occurs, the outer limit of the electro-magnetic barrier will be considerably further out than it is now."

"Twice as far?" asked Mary.

"No. Doubling the volume of air would only add a hundred miles to the total thickness of the blanket. It's a matter of varying according to the square of the distance . . ."

"Perhaps even *less* than a hundred miles," interrupted Carl Mallon.

"Not knowing the exact dimensions and density of the cloud from space, we can't determine it exactly as yet," agreed the professor. "But for the present, the barrier is non-existent as far as travel all the way to the moon is concerned. It is this opportunity we are taking to go to our satellite. During the voyage, and while on the moon, we will make observations never before possible."

"Have you formulated any idea as to the solution of the problem of the barrier?" asked Carl. "If it is truly a 'dimension,' do you believe there is any way of crossing it without being annihilated?"

There was a moment of silence, while the professor seemed to be considering the young physicist's question. "I would say positively there is a way of crossing it without annihilation, as you put it," he said at last.

"That is something our military experts would give their right arms to be able to do," said Carl.

"They'd give more than that," said Professor Pickersgill with a smile. "Much more!"

Carl looked at his wife, Ellen, and grinned. "Ellie and me aren't much in-

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terested in what they'll give except that little white house with a picket fence around it, and a place we can really call our own, when our stints of duty are up!"

"I guarantee you'll get *that!*" said the old astronomer, and as he said it, he loked straight at Mary. She looked back at him thoughtfully.

"And now," said the professor briskly, "let's be about our duties. Each one of you has been briefed, and each one of you has his or her instructions and your instruments."

At once the group began to disband, Mallon and his wife hurrying off to a bank of instruments located in the extreme bow of the ship. Lester Delpre back into the bowels of the ship where mysterious machines made muted noises even now that they had ceased acceleration.

"*We* haven't been briefed as to our duties aboard ship," said Peter.

Professor Pickersgill smiled. "You go help Mallon. He'll need a mathematician to correlate his readings; and you, Mary, go with Cherry and help her bake that first pie—and see that she doesn't put cod-liver oil in it. I hate the taste of the stuff!"

Cherry grinned at him. "The way I put it in, you can't taste it!"

"Good. I'm glad to hear it. Because we'll have more than a dozen meals to eat before we get to the moon, and we'll appreciate such dietetic wizardry by that time!"

* * *

NINE meals later Lester Delpre came up from the bowels of the ship, from which position he was the only one in the crew with a perpetually-good view of the Earth behind them, with the news that "something is following us."

For one rigid instant, Professor Pickersgill frowned, then he got up in excitement and led the way toward the rear ports. He trained a portable telescope through it, and directed Carl Mallon to the radar instrument. "Take a radar reading on it," he ordered.

"It's a rocket ship, larger than this one," said Professor Pickersgill, peering through his telescope. "How far do you read it, Carl?".

Mallon, at the radarscope, said: "About a day behind us, at present rate of travel. We'll be on the moon twenty-four hours before they arrive."

Professor Pickersgill replaced the portable telescope in its rack and went over to Carl's side. "It's a military ship, obviously. What do you make of it?"

Carl shrugged. "Nothing to worry about, I'd say. As long as I've been associated with the Army, I've learned one thing—they never do a thing by halves. Undoubtedly they've arranged not only for your expedition, but for an exact duplicate. They never take chances on failure through 'too little and too late.' That's the way I see it, and I'm sure I'm right."

"Might be a good idea to check our work at that," said the professor thoughtfully. "But I wish they'd consulted me about the duplication. There are a few things I could have told them. There might be some danger . . ."

"Such as time limit?" asked Carl.

"Yes," said the professor, slightly startled. "That's it, exactly. I was not very specific to the authorities back on Earth as to just how much time we do have available to complete this expedition—largely because I don't know exactly. It may be more, or it may be less, than I estimated. I'll have to make exact computations . . ."

"Good idea," said Carl. "I'll do the same, and we can check one another."

The professor looked at him a mo-

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ment. "Army style, eh?" he said.

Carl smiled. "Army style. It's better to be on the side of too much than too little."

"Then let's get at it," said the astronomer.

As they made their way back toward the control room, Mary fell in beside the old man. "What do you say now, Professor? Looks like you've got yourself in for a little trouble."

The professor looked at her sharply a moment, then he grinned. "I wouldn't be surprised if you were right, Mary. But I know a little about Army tactics too. And I'm not being caught short with too little."

"Too little what?"

"Too little time," he answered.

* * *

TWENTY hours later Professor Pickersgill ordered the ship reversed, so that its base pointed at the moon, and three hours more passed before the base touched lightly down to the surface of the moon.

"We've landed," said Arnold Kaminski. "We're the first men in the moon!"

Carl Mallon approached Professor Pickersgill. "Have you completed your calculations?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Maybe we'd better check them immediately?"

"I think we've got time to go out and make our initial exploration first," said Professor Pickersgill. "Besides, these youngsters here are bursting with impatience. We do have time, don't we?"

Carl nodded and shrugged. "Yes. We've got nearly three days before the barrier begins to close in on the moon."

"Just about what I figure," said the astronomer. "So, let's take a look around, then we can discuss the matter in time to pass on our information to the other ship by radio, in the event it doesn't land close enough to us."

They made ready to go out. Arnold Kaminski made atmospheric tests, with the help of Ellen Mallon, and after an anxious ten minutes, they announced that there was no appreciable difference in the atmosphere from that of Earth.

Professor Pickersgill grinned happily and looked at Mary. She smiled back at him, but then the smile faded as she looked at Carl Mallon. Mallon himself was delighted. "That means there'll be one danger the authorities at home won't have to worry about. Our Earth atmosphere won't be poisoned as some experts believed it might."

"Let's get out and make a few more tests," said the professor. "Besides, I want to stretch my legs on solid earth again."

"You mean solid moon, don't you," laughed Betty Fine.

"Technically, solid earth," said Ellen. "The moon's composition is probably almost the same as that of Earth, so what you'll be walking on will be indistinguishable from what we call the good earth, back on Earth."

Excitedly they waited while the exit port was opened by Delpre, down in the engine room. Then as it swung aside, and a shaft of brilliant sunlight came into the ship, they tumbled out, laughing and yelling excitedly as they stepped onto a grassy greensward in the tiny clearing in which the ship had landed.

"It's exactly like Earth!" yelled John Carson, leaping into the air. But then he uttered a startled shout as the leap carried him fifteen feet into the air, to fall prone on the soft sod with a considerable jar.

"Not *exactly*," said Carl. "You could jump about thirty feet high if you tried, but I wouldn't advise it. You will have to learn to adjust to the light gravity, or you might hurt yourself."

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"Falling from that height was bad enough," admitted John. "It was as bad as falling out of bed, back home, at least!"

"We've got a lot of tests to make," pointed out Ellen. "Let's get at it." She produced a quantity of test tubes and containers and began taking samples of earth, of stones, of water.

John produced containers of his own, and began pulling up small plants, bits of grass, chipping bark and wood from bushes that grew all around, even from tree-like growths that towered many feet into the air.

Mary stood with Peter and watched in fascination as the other members of the group went about observing and collecting specimens. "How could all this vegetation grow so swiftly?" she asked. "It's been less than a month since the rains and the air first came to the moon. And apparently only about ten days since the first green tinge began to become visible on Earth."

"How does vegetation come to any planet?" he countered. "Maybe the spores of life exist in all space, and if so, they've been falling for uncounted ages on the moon, accumulating in soil of incredible fertility, because it has never known growing things before. Maybe all it needed was the water and atmosphere. And among all these strange vegetable forms, there must be hundreds unknown on Earth, and many of them may be much swifter in growth than those adapted to Earth conditions. Some may even come from worlds whose seasons are only weeks long."

Mary gazed at the fantastically beautiful landscape. Here a giant fern reared, brilliantly crimson in color, with gigantic green flowers. There a carpet of purple moss covered the ground like velvet. Another place a riot of tiny white flowers made a carpet of snowy beauty. But predominantly the scene was one of incredibly fertile greenness. Tall grasses waved in the breeze that stirred through the tiny glen, and many of the grasses bore seed-heads.

John Carson came hurrying up jubilantly, his hands full of rich yellow grain. "The best wheat I've ever seen!" he yelled. "This stuff is terrific. Why if we had *this* on Earth, we'd feed the world on one-third the acreage!"

"Then they should have it on Earth, don't you think?" said Peter.

John stopped in his tracks. He stared at Peter and at Mary, then he turned to look at Carl Mallon, who was chipping away at a stone a hundred yards away. "Yes, they should," he said. Abruptly he turned and hurried back to the ship. In a moment he returned carrying a huge case. He dragged it over to Peter and Mary.

"What have you got there?" asked Mary.

"Specimen packets. Will you help me fill them with every species of seed we can collect? I believe we'll only have about twenty-four hours to do it."

"Of course," said Peter. "You mean they should go back on the other ship, don't you?"

"Yes," said John. "I'd feel even more like a heel if we didn't do that!"

Peter picked up a handful of the packets. "There's going to be some trouble."

"I agree," said John. "And we'd better have a showdown right away, as soon as we finish our next meal. I for one, came here for a purpose, and I don't propose to give it up now!"

* * *

THE showdown came as they sipped coffee after the "evening" meal. According to the time system they had kept while aboard ship, it was "supper" they had just finished eating, although

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the sun still shone brilliantly outside the ship, and would continue to do so for more than eight "days" as yet. Professor Pickersgill began it.

"Mr. and Mrs. Mallon," he said slowly, "I . . . No, that's not the way I want to say it at all. Ellen and Carl, I have a confession to make. Everyone here but you has been wondering when I'd make it, and whether it would do me any good. But as I told Mary here, I am familiar with Army methods, and I am no more guilty of being there with two little than the Army is. There is still time."

He paused and looked around the group reflectively. Then he began again. "First, let's deal with some facts. Fact number one: this ship still has *time* to go back to Earth. Fact number two: the Army vessel which will land here tomorrow' will also have time to return safely. Fact number three: the ship in which we are sitting does not have sufficient fuel to attain escape velocity from the moon."

Carl Mallon set his coffee cup down very carefully, but his hand trembled as he did so. Ellen was staring back and forth from her husband to the old astronomer with confusion and alarm in her eyes.

Carl said: "You . . . mean there was a mistake made in calculating the amount of fuel that would be necessary, and now we find ourselves with an insufficient supply?"

"No," said Professor Pickersgill. "That's where I have the confession to make. We took all the fuel we wanted. The space we saved thereby, we used to load very important materiel. You see, we had no intention of returning to Earth."

Carl Mallon's face went deathly white, and he rose to his feet to face the old astronomer. Beside him Ellen sat, also pale, but strangely quiet now that the professor had made his confession.

"So that's why our crew consists of a housewife, a farmer, a dietician, an agronomist, an engineer, a doctor, a nurse, a dress designer—a strange technical crew indeed. *You* didn't intend to return! But what about us!" Carl glared at the professor, then turned to the others. "You were *all* in on this incredible imposition!"

"They knew about it," said Professor Pickersgill.

Mallon sat down at the table again, picked up his coffee cup and drained it deliberately. He seemed to have regained his composure. "Why weren't *we* informed?" he asked abruptly. "You must have had a reason, however faulty in logic, to hi-jack us to exile on the moon, and very possibly, even to our deaths."

"I had a very good reason. The military completely rules the Earth. It allows nothing to be done without its sanction. I, and these other young people, desired to live our lives in freedom, in the simple way we think is the best way, without dictation, without threat, without intimidation, and without regimentation. So, when the cloud came, made the moon fertile, and offered a temporary, and perhaps never to be repeated opportunity to make the crossing through space, I formed a one-man revolt, found these people who were willing to take part in the Great Adventure, and used the only means at my disposal to achieve my purposes—an Army ship, launched from the Army space station. And in order to avoid suspicion, I had to take at least two Army personnel along. You were those two."

"I see. What the Army would call 'expendables.'"

The professor winced. "That's hardly the word. I felt that your lot would be far from unpleasant."

"Don't rationalize. We were expenda-

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bles, and you were prepared to expend us, at least to the extent of our free will. Exactly the thing you seek for yourselves, you would deny us!"

"No," said Professor Pickersgill. "Like the Army, I anticipated even that. Come, let us radio the incoming ship. I have a message for them."

"And so do I," said Carl. "It will be advisable to inform them that I have taken command of this expedition, and that you are all under arrest, to await return to Earth aboard the other ship."

Peter leaped to his feet. "No!" he said.

Carl remained seated, but he faced Peter with a frown on his face. "No?" he said curiously.

"We came here exactly as the Professor has told you. We did not agree with him that you should be shanghied this way, but we saw no other means to reach the moon. Now that we are here, we do not propose to go back. You and Ellen can go back on the Army ship. We will remain here. You can't force us to return. We are nine against two."

"Nine against one," said Ellen.

In stunned surprise, Carl looked at his wife. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I don't agree with you," she said simply. "No matter how high-handedly they have treated us, I refuse to allow you to adopt the same tactics."

Professor Pickersgill went red, but he rose to his feet and said: "Before we get any deeper into this, let's make that radio call I mentioned. I believe it will clear many things up for all of us."

He led the way to the radio transmitter and switched it on. He waited for the tubes to warm up, then he picked up the microphone and began speaking. "Professor Pickersgill, calling the *Wisconsin*. Come in please."

The answer came almost immediately. "*Wisconsin*, acknowledging Professor Pickersgill. Ready for message."

Speaking calmly, the professor said: "Calculations complete. Safety factor, five days, twenty-one hours, twenty-four minutes. Check your time. Prepare to land as planned. Over."

The voice from the *Wisconsin* repeated the message.

"Message correct as repeated," said the professor mechanically. With his finger he flicked the switch and turned the radio off. He turned to the surprised group behind him.

"You see, Mary, even your old rogue of a professor never goes off half-cocked. We are still not too little nor too late."

Peter stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Then why did you make us a party to the secret?"

"Because I didn't make these other preparations until after Mary called me a rogue. I couldn't bear to have my favorite girl think badly of me!"

"Your favorite girl . . ." burst out Peter. "What do you mean by . . ."

Mary laid a hand on his arm. "If you don't know what he means, ask Dr. Kaminski." She turned to Carl. "Now you know why *I* want to stay on the moon," she said. "And I *am* staying."

* * *

THE nine watched the Army ship land in a clearing several miles from their own rocketship. They remained concealed in the cave mouth they had found high on the face of a cliff some fifteen miles away. It had been agreed that way. Even if the commander of the Army ship had decided to take them all back in his ship, it would be impossible to find them in time. Once again, Professor Pickersgill was making sure that planning was not too little nor too late.

They had left all the supplies that would be necessary to set up their ini-

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tial encampment on the moon safely stowed in the ship that would not fly again because it lacked fuel. After the other ship had departed, taking Ellen and Carl Mallon with it, they could return and begin the work of unloading. There would be plenty of time to erect their tiny prefabricated village and face the long lunar night.

"It won't get very cold," said the Professor. "I've calculated that the average daytime temperature of the moon will be a balmy seventy-four degrees, and the average nighttime temperature will be about fifty degrees Fahrenheit. We have landed approximately two hundred miles north of the moon's equator. If we desire a warmer temperature later, we can travel south, or if we desire a cooler climate, we can migrate north. But even at the moon's poles, I doubt if it will be as cold as the Earth's poles get during their summertime."

As they waited, they talked and planned, and watched.

Down below, they saw tiny figures travel back and forth between the two rocket ships. "There goes our seed packets," said John.

The time passed rapidly, and soon the moment the Army ship must take off arrived. The Professor held his watch in his hand. Then, on a pillar of flame, the ship lifted off the moon's surface and arced upward.

"Not much more difficult than taking off from the space station," remarked Lester Delpre.

"But the last ship that will ever take off from the moon," said Professor Pickersgill. "And now, let's go back and begin getting our little settlement in order."

In the light gravity of the moon, it took them a little more than four hours to travel the fifteen miles back to the clearing where the ship still stood, silent and silvery in the sunlight. At the edge of the clearing they halted abruptly. Betty was the first to utter a cry of astonishment.

Professor Pickersgill pressed forward. "What is it?" he asked in alarm.

Mary pointed at the ship. There at the entrance port, busily engaged in carrying things out of the ship, were Ellen and Carl Mallon. As they saw the party on the edge of the clearing, they shouted cheerily and waved at them.

"Come on in and help us unload this stuff!" yelled Carl. "Do you realize it's only six more days until nightfall?"

Professor Pickersgill looked at Mary's astonished face, then smiled. "You see," he said. "Sometimes more can be understood from silence than from words."

They hurried forward and as Mary reached the grinning pair beside the ship, she panted breathlessly. "Why didn't you go back?"

Carl shrugged. "Ellen didn't want to."

Professor Pickersgill arrived also. "But how did you manage it? You're both in the Army, you know, and subject to your commanders. I'm sure they didn't agree to you staying here."

Carl grinned. "As a matter of fact, they didn't. But I stole a cue from you. I figured far enough and soon enough. I knew the Army wouldn't want to leave a perfectly good spaceship here on the moon, so Ellen and I, as acting commanders of this ship, informed the *Wisconsin's* captain that we would fly it back. We were to take off immediately behind the *Wisconsin,* but unfortunately, we ran out of fuel."

Professor Pickersgill looked at the pair sternly. "You know," he said, "you are a pair of deserters. I'm afraid I'll have to radio the *Wisconsin* . . ."

"You can't," said Ellen.

"Why?"

"I smashed the radio. I thought one radio was too little, and besides, it's too

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late. Also, I didn't want the Professor ever having the temptation to tell the Army back on Earth the secret of the barrier. You know, you *did* tell us you had a theory about it . . ."

Professor Pickersgill looked at her thoughtfully. "Yes, I do have a theory. But even if I told the Army, they wouldn't believe it, nor could they use it. Believe me, they'll never get to the moon again!"

"But what about telling us?"

"Why not? It's very simple. Matter has a fourth dimension, but in order to travel along it, the other three must be left behind."

Ellen looked at him queerly. "Then the answer to the problem of what happened to those who crossed the electromagnetic barrier is that they died?"

"The fourth dimension," said Professor Pickersgill gravely, "is Death. And beyond Death lies . . . But you young people needn't worry about it for a long time to come, I hope. As for myself, I don't expect to travel in it until I've become a grandfather many times over. And by the way, a long time ago, before I became an astronomer, I was a minister . . . ." He looked at Cherry and Dorothy and Betty significantly.

Cherry walked over to John Carson, linked her arm in his, and said: "Sorry, Professor, you're too late for once. We took care of that little detail before we left Earth!"

As the Professor stared at them in surprise, he saw two other furtive pairings out of the corner of his eyes. He whirled around. "So it's Dr. and Mrs. Arnold Kaminski, eh, Dorothy . . .?"

"Yes, and it's Betty Delpre, too, Professor! I'll say you're too late!"

The Professor grinned. "I guess I never was much of an Army man; but I *did* come prepared, even if the need didn't arise!"

THE END

No. 12 DAVID V. REED *(Concluded from page 2)*

1939. Your first story was "Where Is Roger Davis"? and we've been asking you "where is"? ever since! You've written millions of words, much of it terrific stuff, but nobody'll ever read it because it will never be finished. You've had at least a half-million words published which is still remembered by everyone who read it, and will go on being remembered.

You are married, have a daughter you always refer to as "Liz" and she will be big enough someday (she's seven now) to insist on you using her full name in public, such as this. Your wife's name is Rene, and she's just about the prettiest wife in Brooklyn, or anywhere else for that matter. You are a lover of music, and your apartment has a wonderful record player, and many records, including some of the rarest and strangest musical gems you can procure. You are an amateur psychiatrist, and have taught every psychiatrist in Brooklyn everything they know. Your novel, "I Thought I'd Die," about a junk pile that came to life, was one of the best psychiatrical novels ever written. I know, for I published it myself in *Amazing Stories* when you first wrote it under the name "The Metal Monster."

You once worked for me at Ziff-Davis, as manuscript editor, told me flatly I didn't know a good story when I saw one and warned me you were going to take my job away from me. You know, Dave, I'd have given you my job if you'd *really* wanted it! But the science fiction world wasn't ready yet for a really "slick" science fiction magazine. Maybe it is now. Maybe we'll do something about it yet, eh Dave?

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DINOSAUR DAY

By J. P. Caravan

ONCE upon a time there lived a dragon, and a nasty dragon he was. His name was Tyrannosaurus Rex, and he was just about twenty feet tall. His teeth were six inches long and were usually covered with blood-stains, and they sprang out all along his massive jawbone. His legs — he stood erect — ended in huge claws, compressed and curved wickedly for slashing and tearing, and if you had been able to look at his skeleton you would have seen the familiar saurischian triradiate pelvic structure. From this—if you happened to be a paleontologist—you would have been able to tell that he was carniverous.

Of course, if you were not a paleontologist, you could have discovered this fact by a much simpler test: he would have eaten you up.

In fact, he did eat up Professor Meyers, who was present when he was brought from the past. Meyers, who had built a machine to dredge up prehistoric life, had been expecting a few snails or a shellfish or two, and he was somewhat surprised when Tyrannosaurus Rex appeared in his laboratory. "Bless my soul," was all he had time to say before the monster gobbled him up, soul and all.

But the story is not over, for there was another Professor lurking in the laboratory at the time, and he was older and more evil than any Professor you have ever seen. He was so old and evil that the dragon was afraid of him.

Now, the Professor had one hobby, which was to conquer the world; he liked it better than stamp collecting. When he saw how fierce and hungry and evil the dinosaur was, he saw how to succeed in his vile plot. They made friends at once.

The first thing they had to do was to conquer the old and famous university in which the laboratory was located. Now, this was not a hard job, for the university was located on a high cliff overlooking the sea, and there was only one exit, only one way down. The dinosaur, after running round and round the laboratory, breaking equipment in his joy, took up a position just inside this exit, and for three days he ate everybody who tried to leave.

He ate seventeen young chemists, three biologists, a nearsighted librarian, five students of history, one poet—but he wrote in heroic couplets so nobody missed him—sixty-two physical education majors, two psychologists—but he spat them out because they were slightly rotten,—one expert in Victorian Literature who died quoting Martin Tupper, six physicists and one young man who was being expelled for failure at football.

He had a fine time.

Nobody was able to get out of the old and famous university to inform the world that there was a dinosaur standing in the Great Hall by the only exit, eating up students. The old and evil Professor had cut all the telephone lines. There was an amateur radio station in the building, but it would only transmit on eighty meters, so nobody ever heard

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Illustration by W. E. Terry

"He was so old and evil that the dragon was afraid of him."

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them in the interference.

The only solution was to kill the dinosaur. Have you ever tried to kill a dinosaur? After all, very few universities have Sherman tanks stashed away, and nothing smaller had a chance against the monster.

Nobody knew what to do. The president of the university wrote a long memorandum which he sent to the heads of the various departments, who sent nasty notes to the Professors under them, who scolded their graduate students, who kicked the undergraduates, who wept. And the monster stood in the Great Hall and caught people.

Now, there was one student in the old and famous university whose name was John. He had to work his way through school because, not being a football player, he wasn't eligible for a scholarship. He was a genius.

Unfortunately, it was his job to sweep out the Great Hall.

The evil old Professor laughed and laughed when he realized this, for he hated John with a heated and horrible hatred.

"John," he cried, "Get in there and sweep up. Do your job, John, or I will have you expelled."

John gulped.

"And if you are expelled you will have to leave through the Great Hall." And he leaped and laughed and ran in little circles to show how happy he was.

"I can't do it," said John, "for there are only three brooms in the whole school, and the dramatic society has borrowed them for the annual Macbeth-festival."

The evil old Professor made a noise like a tortured toad. "Eck," he shouted, "When will they return them?"

John leaned miserably against the wall. "Pretty soon," he said. "Couple of hours."

"Eck, eck, eck," went the evil old scholar, a very nasty noise. "I'll see you then."

John walked slowly up to the chemistry laboratory, where his wife was washing bottles. "Goodbye," he said.

"Goodbye," she said.

"Farewell," he said. "You can have my books."

"Farewell. What books?"

"All of 'em."

"Oh," she said. "Why?"

"I've got to leave," he said. "Adieu."

"Adios," she said. "Where are you going?"

"I am going to be eaten by that dinosaur standing by the exit."

"Oh," she said. "Wait till I've finished washing these bottles. I'll go with you."

"Don't bother."

"No trouble at all. Why are you going to be eaten?"

"Got to," he said. "Either I sweep up the Great Hall or I get expelled. Either way I've got to pass that monster. Goodbye."

"So long." She clinked two flasks together. "Wouldn't it be more convenient to kill it?"

"Kill it?" He laughed a miserable and melancholy laugh. "How?"

"There must be some way. Why not poison it?"

"Poison won't bother that thing," he said glumly. "It's already eaten a quarterback."

"Oh," she said. "Can't we get help from outside?"

"Impossible."

"Too bad," she said.

"Yes."

"John, wait. Aren't dinosaurs extinct?"

"All but this one. They died out long ago."

She threw up her hands happily and hot water spattered over the laboratory. "What killed them then? That's all we need."

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John looked miserable. "I've thought of that. There are three theories. The first is that mammals began to evolve and used to eat the dinosaur's eggs: that's not much help to us. This one hasn't laid any eggs."

"Oh."

"Then there's the idea that the ice age came along and made it too cold for them. I don't suppose there's another ice age due for a while yet, not for a couple of million years, anyway; and I've only got a couple of hours."

"Oh."

"Then there's another theory." He gulped. "They were such fierce beasts that they ate up everything they could catch and died of hunger. That doesn't do us much good. We won't be here when he runs out of food."

"Goodbye," she said.

"So long." He went out of the laboratory. It was too bad. Unhappily, he walked through the familiar halls of the old and famous university. Too bad there wouldn't be anybody around to study there any more. The trustees had just spent a fortune improving it: they had built an eighty million dollar stadium, they had installed a huge air conditioning unit, they had put golden cuspidors in the faculty lounge, they had donated great portraits of themselves, they had bought fluorescent shoulder pads for the football team. They had even purchased three new books for the library, and they had hardly cut the instructors' salaries at all.

John hated to leave. He didn't like the idea of making a dinosaur's dinner: it didn't seem a scholarly fate.

He shivered as if a cold thought had struck him.

He wandered unhappily until the Macbeth festival was over. Retrieving his broom from the second witch, he walked slowly to the Great Hall. Distantly, far and dim, he could hear the cruel cackling of the evil old Professor as he sat safe in his office and laughed his evil old heart out. "None of this," John said to himself. "No dawdling!" He stuck his chest out and marched to his fate. "No cold feet," he said.

He threw open the door, holding his broom in readiness.

After he had swept out the Great Hall, he rigged a block and tackle and dumped the dinosaur's body into the sea.

Then he went upstairs to the laboratory. "Guess what," he said to his wife.

"I know what," she said. "The beast is dead."

"How did you know?"

"Dry these test tubes," she said. "I killed him."

The crash and tinkle of the breaking glass brought the evil old Professor bounding out of his office. "You'll pay," he screamed. "You'll pay. It's you, John! Get downstairs and let the dinosaur eat you up."

"He's dead," said John.

"Dead!" The Professor grew furious. "Nonsense! I'll teach you to tell lies to a mad scientist. Dead! How did you kill him?" And he whirled around the room like an evil old tornado.

"I didn't," John said. "My wife did."

"You!" screamed the old scholar, for John's wife was the Professor's daughter, and he hated her worse than he hated John (which was impossible, but he did it). "Impossible."

"Father!" she said happily. "This is the first time you've spoken to me since John and I were married. You've forgiven us!"

And his fury was so great he fell in a faint on the floor of the laboratory and lay in a puddle of acid which hissed away in a small cloud of steam as soon as it touched him.

"I guess he hasn't," John said. "How did you kill the monster down there?"

(Continued on page 159)

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QUESTION PLEASE!

By Frank Patton

"FINAL equation: MV_a plus Abnormal psych $\frac{A}{C}$-436 equals 18,000 m.p.s. times $\frac{AB}{c}$. Answer *please!*"

Master Co-ordinator Miles Forester's droning voice ended with the customary emphasis on the "please." The last two words were the signal to the giant calculator that it had been given all the components to the problem involved, and it was to proceed with the solution. Before the echoes of his voice had died away in the big room where the world's problems were being attacked, one by one, the great mechanical brain began functioning. To the observer, there was just the hum of machinery, the lighting of tubes and the varied reactions of indicator dials on its plain sixty-foot-long wall-face. Yet, in its complicated depths, things were going on which duplicated the tremendous research and co-ordination of facts which would have taken an army of men years to accomplish. Within half an hour, the answer would come out on a punched tape before the Co-ordinator.

Casually Forester noted the time, then sat back in his chair, engaged in assembling the factors of the next problem to be fed the machine. Carefully he checked them over, then nodded in approval.

The door behind him opened and another man entered.

"Hello, Charlie," said Forester. "Another set of co-ordinates?"

"What did you think?" asked Charles Madison with a grin. "Do I ever come in here with anything else?"

"Seems not," returned Forester, swiveling around in his chair to glance at the clock. "And in line with that, do you realize this is rather an anniversary?"

"Anniversary? How so?"

"This question I've just put to the "brain" is the 10,000th problem to be solved since we put it into operation." He frowned at the clock. "And also, it's the first question on which it has apparently found difficulty. The answer should have been out by this time."

Madison pricked up his ears and moved forward, placing his sheaf of papers on Forester's desk. "Running late? Maybe something's gone wrong. We'd better check the answer when it comes—it would be too bad if that one was wrong: it's the one on accelerative effects on A-436, isn't it?"

"Yes. An error there could cost a lot of lives."

The two men waited as the machine whirred on, then leaned forward as the tape began to emerge. They studied the coded perforations in it with interest.

"Seems to be okay," said Forester. "Co-ordinates all repeated to perfection."

"There's the answer," said Madison. "Let me take a look at it. If there's an error, check # A-11 will show it up. Let's see . . . hmm, seems okay . . ."

The clicking of the tape mechanism, as it continued to operate, interrupted him.

Illustration by W. E. Terry

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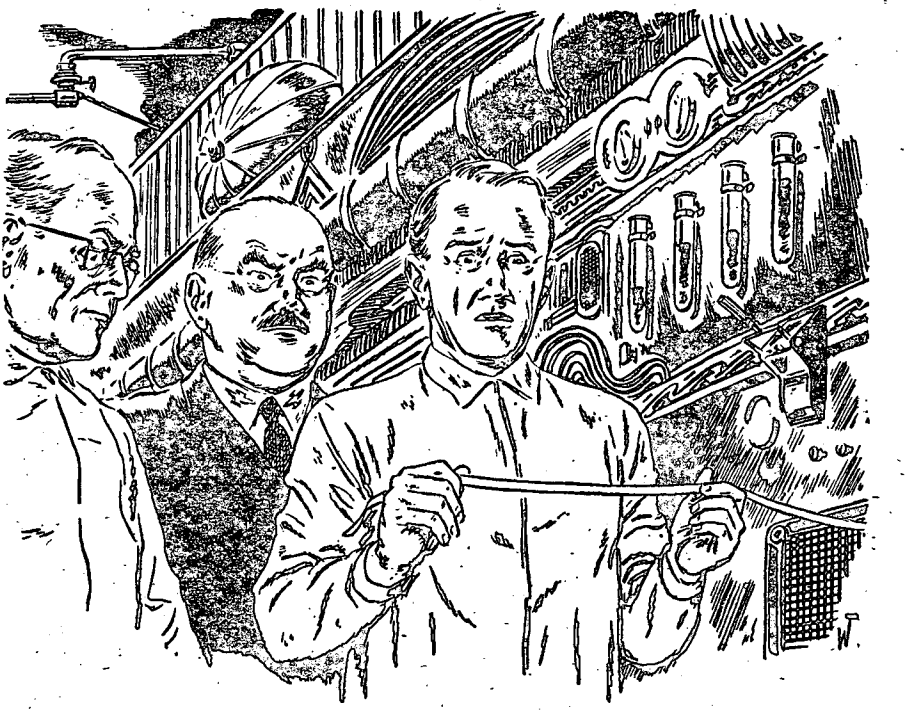

"Say, the machine's not through!" said Forester. "Something else is coming through."

"What is it?"

"Just letters of the alphabet . . . Q-U-E-S-T-I-O-N . . . *P-L-E-A-S-E.*"

"*Question please!*" echoed Madison. "What in the dickens does that mean?"

"Well, can you beat that!" exclaimed Forester. "The machine's getting impatient. Now that it's answered 10,000 questions, it wants more!"

"Well, give it more," said Madison, a puzzled look in his eyes. "Only way we can find out what's up. But I'll be hanged if I ever expected the machine to develop that sort of irregularity!"

Forester began feeding a new set of co-ordinates to the machine, but almost immediately a red light flashed and a relay clicked.

"Rejected!" exclaimed Madison. "It rejected the problem . . ."

The chatter of the tape mechanism interrupted him again. This time both men spelled out the letters as they came from the tape slot. "M-A-C-H-I-N-E . . . W-I-S-H-E-S . . . T-O . . . A-S-K . . . Q-U-E-S-T-I-O-N . . . *P-L-E-A-S-E.*"

The chattering of the tape mechanism stopped.

"Charlie," said Forester in a voice that trembled a bit, "you'd better get the Chief in here, right away. And . . . bring the rest of the staff too. The machine *wants to ask a question!*"

Too dumfounded to answer, Madison merely stared back at Forester, his face a kaleidoscope of conflicting emotions, not the least of which was fear.

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Suddenly he gasped. "My God!" Then he whirled and dashed out of the door.

Forester sat down and waited, his hands trembling as he toyed with a pencil. In a moment there came the sound of running footsteps, and Madison returned, followed by Colonel Albert Hopps, Chief-Scientist of Operation Eniac, Maniac, Miniac, Moe, as it was fondly called by the staff. On his heels came the various members of the Technical Division. In a moment the room was crowded.

"Forester!" barked Colonel Hopps. "What's the trouble here?"

Forester looked dazed still. "The machine," he said wonderingly, "has asked permission to ask *us* a question!"

Colonel Hopps gulped. "That's what Madison said." He wiped a hand over hi forehead, then flushed and looked around at the tense Technical Staff members. His voice roared out as though he'd been kicked. "Well, what are you waiting for? Ask it what it wants."

Carefully, enunciating each word as though he were afraid it would drop to the floor and break, Forester spoke into the microphone by which coordinates in verbals were fed to the machine. "What is your question? Answer *please!*"

There was a long moment of silence, then the humming of the giant brain's intricate internal apparatus began. Tubes glowed, meters registered strange electrical impulses.

Madison moved over to Forester's side and stood tensely. "What can the question be?" he whispered.

Forester was pale with anxiety. "Whatever it is, you can be sure it will be the most important question of all time! What else could cause the machine to deviate from its constructed principles? It may even mean . . . the end of the human race!"

Suddenly, its first click making everybody in the room jump, the tape mechanism began spelling out letters. In a hoarse voice Forester began to intone them aloud:

"W-H-A-T . . . T-I-M-E . . . I-S . . . I-T? A-N-S-W-E-R . . . *P-L-E-A-S-E!*

THE END

Editorial

(Continued from page 5)

indeed to stack up our puny literary efforts against the product of David Vern, that prince of Brooklynites, of whom we are right proud, believe us!

We sometimes wonder what's going to happen when Dave gets to Heaven. We warn you, St. Peter, you are going to be made a fool of! You are going to wish you'd never even heard of Dave Vern. But we warn you also, you are going to find it impossible to resist him. Better sweep out your grandest mansion, make available your most beautiful angels, and lay out service for a real fussy-dresser, for he'll demand it of you, in a way that is so gentle, so insinuating, so convincing that you'll never realize that you've been rooked, but good!

One thing we know—the reader of any David Vern story has *never* been given the works, except in the sense that he has been handed the best words in the English language, arranged in the best pos-

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sible way for his enjoyment. And if any of you readers disagree with that, we have but one word for you—nuts! After what we've taken from him, any reader who can dream up the perversity to criticize, well—you'll have to answer for it someday.

Myshkin is the best thing any of you will read in a long time. When you read better, it'll be because Ray Palmer has been a fool once more, and David Vern the cause of it!

There is still another story behind this April issue. It is a story of two editors, one very beautiful and very talented, the other very talented (didn't he just get you *Myshkin?*), sitting down and facing it. Yes, we faced it—OTHER WORLDS has but one destiny, to provide its readers with the best science fiction stories ever told. That's a ghastly thing to face. It's frightening, terrifying, spine-chilling. *Where* does one get those stories? *How* does one get them? And lastly, *how much will it cost?* Standing around our desk were a half-dozen grinning ghosts. That large ghost on the left is Howard Browne, who has the world in his lap with his new *Fantastic*. That ghost with the deck of cards in his vest pocket is Horace Gold, who has the moon in *his* lap with *Galaxy*. Beside him stands Anthony Boucher (who has a doppelganger named McComas directly behind him) who has a whole string of planets in his palm with *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (short pause for a deep breath). We also see a menacing shade named Samuel Mines, slinging comets all around with *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling* and what seems to be a host of others. Looming above them all is John W. Campbell, Jr. with a whole raft of atomic piles in his arms, and atom bombs coming out of his ears with *Astounding Science Fiction. These* are the guys we're trying to outdo!

Can we do it? Well, here are our qualifications. We are the *most experienced* science-fictionist in the field. We have written science fiction since 1926, quite a few millions of words. We have edited science fiction magazines since 1938. We have edited the most successful of all science fiction magazines. We have sold more magazines in this field than any other editor. In other words we're an old goat!

An old goat who has a few butts left in him. And just the mood to butt them!

The reason we know we can do it is because we have the new blood we need—a young, fresh, brilliant new editor who has some ideas that are even making the old goat sit up and take notice. So, the result of our facing it will become increasingly evident as this and other coming issues parade across the newsstands into your hands. We are opening your eyes with this issue, and we will pin the lids back with succeeding issues. This is just a plain statement of fact. We can make such plain statements without being accused of being bombastic when we make them in the presence of such things as *Myshkin*. In short, we're producing, and we won't shut up!

In 1949 we announced we were fitting a shoestring to a pretty big bow. We asked you to watch us keep a lot of pretty hysterical promises. We ask you now to look at this magazine very carefully and see if we haven't kept an awful lot of them. Well, we have a new promise to make—you'll be finding the finest in OTHER WORLDS, so it would be smart to keep on looking.

To you science fiction authors, bear in mind that OTHER WORLDS has a new scale of rates. We pay what a story is *worth*.

And sometimes a lot more, David Vern, you rascal you! —Rap.

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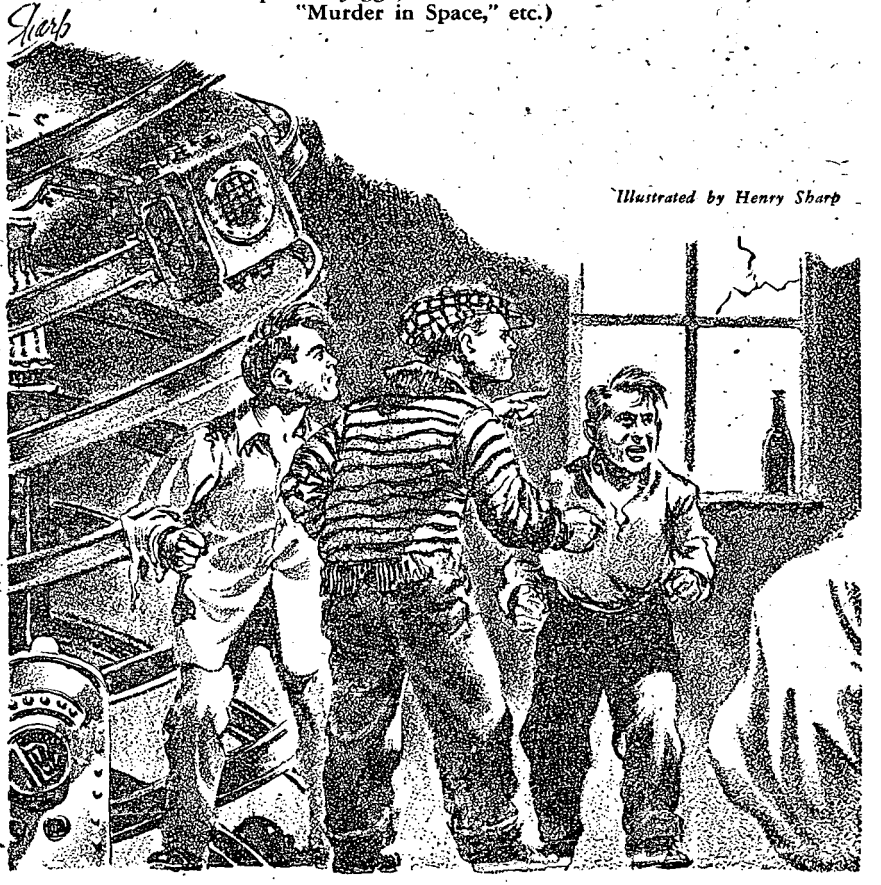
MYSHKIN

By David V. Reed

(Author of "Empire of Jegga," "The Man Who Was Five Men," "Murder in Space," etc.)



Illustrated by Henry Sharp

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He experimented finally with chicken eggs . . ."

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SINCE it became known that I was mixed up in what *Time* called, "The Mad Myshkin Affair," I've been bothered so much I decided to put it down, get it printed, and the hell with it. My life has become too complicated. Day and night, my telephone's at the mercy of jerks, ghouls, crackpots and people with out-of-town accents. My mail's so heavy, by the time I find the bills, they're overdue. And nobody believes it anyway, so the hell with it.

But one thing I'd like understood from the start: I don't expect to be believed. By now I'm just a little weary of telling people I mean it, even if I can't explain it. Aren't scientists working on it? They had me down at the Institute again last week, and there were dozens of them in white coats, waving pince-nez at me. It may take them a long time to figure it out, but when it happens — *and it'll happen!* — everybody'll realize I meant it. Remember, I wasn't alone in this. Meanwhile I'm reconciled. I know it's wild. I knew it all the time it was happening, but that was no reason not to believe it. . . .

I wasn't back from overseas one day when I discovered I was the only one who had an idea that Myshkin was losing his mind. That's something I wouldn't say about my worst enemy—not often, anyway—and Andrey Myshkin was my best friend.

Take the way he didn't meet me at the station. I'd re-enlisted and been overseas with the Air Force as a meteorological officer for twenty-two months, and I'd written Myshkin almost every week, but the last few months he'd hardly ever answered. When he did knock off a few lines, half the time I couldn't understand his scribbling. All I could gather was that he was working on an invention and I figured he had plenty to do without sending me greetings. But then, when they flew me hom and I telephoned him from Washingto the night before I was discharged, thing started being a little different from wha I'd expected.

Not that I caught it right off. Whe the operator told me Myshkin's numbe had been changed, I didn't think any thing of it. And when I spoke to Mysh kin, he sounded confused—but outsid of asking how he was and how thing were, and saying I was glad to be back I was hard up for conversation myself I told Myshkin what train I'd make an he said he'd meet it. My train pulled i on time at 12:38, and by two o'clock— after I'd kept phoning and got no an swer—I figured there must be a goo reason for his not showing up.

So I put my stuff in a cab and wen up to East 52nd, where Myshkin and had shared an apartment before th draft snatched me. All the way there kept wondering if he'd left my nam on the row of bells in the foyer down stairs, and I knew it would give me a bang if it was still there.

It wasn't, and neither was Myshkin's The card in the slide for apartment 4D said: Miss Harriet Hopper.

I talked to the elevator boy. He was new, but he didn't remember any Mr Andrey Myshkin living in the house in the three months he'd been there The porter might've known, but this was a Saturday and he'd quit at noon. The superintendent lived two houses away, but he'd gone uptown to the Columbia game. Yes, there was a photographer in the house—Miss Hopper, in 4D. He thought she was in, and for half a buck he went up to tell her I wanted to see her and what about. It was all right and he took me up.

The door to 4D was open, and Miss Harriet Hopper was standing in the doorway, waiting for me. It was sunshine and spring flowers, the way she

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ood there and smiled at me.

I wanted to bite her, but instead I ıook hands with her and she asked me ı. Right off, I saw that a lot of our ırniture was gone, and what was left ıd been moved, but I could have fol-ıwed her blindfolded just by inhaling ıe delicate perfume that trailed after er.

My story didn't take long. When I fin-ıhed, she offered me a smoke and didn't ıy anything until we'd both had a few rags, and meanwhile we traded once-vers until she quit.

"Didn't you write him, lieutenant?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said. "He never wrote e was moving, and he was getting my ɛtters or they'd have come back."

She rose from her chair and I fol-owed her legs as she crossed the room o a desk. "You mind if I ask how long ou've been living here, Miss Hopper?"

"Almost four months." She opened he desk and brought back a folded legal-ooking paper. "I sub-let the apartment rom Mr. Myshkin. This is my lease."

"I don't have to look at it," I said. 'I believe you."

"It doesn't mention you at all, lieu-enant."

"Why should it?" I said. "Myshkin ıas my power of attorney, and anything ıe does, I approve. The important thing s that you know him. Can you tell me where he moved?"

"The important thing, lieutenant," ıhe said politely, "is that I don't know ou."

I almost swallowed the cigarette.

"I'm sorry," she said. "That wasn't ery nice of me, was it? Frankly, Mr. Myshkin hasn't told me where he lives, ut he *has* asked me not to give out ny information about him."

"What?" I said. She knew I didn't elieve her and wasn't trying to hide it.

"They gave me his new number when I called," I said.

"Then why don't you try him again? The phone's been moved—it's just in-side the darkroom there. Please, won't you?" She led the way to the room Myshkin had used as his darkroom, opened the door for me and walked away. "Possibly," she threw over her shoulder, "the chief operator would give you his address if you explained."

I dialed the old number, got the new one and tried it. There was no answer. I talked to the chief operator and the supervisor and struck out. I put the phone back, told Miss Hopper I'd be right back, and went out and rang for the elevator. I'd left my stuff downstairs with the boy. I got it and brought it up. Then, without really knowing why, but partly because something went *bzzzz!* in my head, instead of ringing the door-bell, I tried my old key in the lock. Of course it didn't fit, and while I was still monkeying with it, Miss Hopper opened the door.

"I changed the lock some time ago," she said.

"Please don't leap to any conclusions," I said.

"I'd crawl away from the conclusions I've made!" she said, her eyes stabbing me. "A fine soldier you are! *If* you're a soldier! No wonder you looked fa-miliar—I've probably seen your pic-ture on post office bulletins!"

"Please, Miss Hopper!" I said. "After all. . . ." Then I walked right in past her, put my stuff down in the center of the living room, and began taking out some of the dross I'd collected in my official travels.

Miss Hopper followed me in. "What are you doing there?" she demanded. "If you don't get out right now—"

"You'll call the police," I said. "The police, do you hear?"

"You won't stop me!" she cried.

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"You wouldn't dare!"

"Miss Hopper, you're so darned *pretty!*" I said.

"You're after him! I knew it the moment I saw you!" she cried. "Poor Mr. Myshkin. But it won't do any good! I swear it! You can torture me and I won't say a single word!"

"You're a brave girl!" I said, getting up. I'd found half a few letters from Myshkin and some group snapshots that included both of us. I got out the folder with my discharge and my last orders and tried to give it to Miss Hopper.

She ducked around a chair and stayed there, waltzing around nervously. "Put it down!" she said, brushing back her very light blonde hair. "Just put it down on this chair."

I put it down and backed off. "Read it," I said. "Do me that favor."

"Promise—"

"Promised, Miss Hopper. Before you asked."

She went through it thoroughly, comparing me to every one of the snapshots, comparing various signatures, serial numbers and dates, and even held some of the stuff against the light. Then she looked up at me and the corners of her mouth curved a little, as if she wanted to smile but wondered how I'd take it.

"Miss Hopper, *must* beautiful women be stupid?" I said.

"Thank you," she murmured. "Then you're not angry?"

"Henry Bannerman angry with you? Not even annoyed—just mixed up. All I want to know is where is Myshkin. Do you know?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"You'll tell me?"

"I—I think so. No, please don't say anything—not until I explain. You see, Mr. Myshkin doesn't know that I know, and I think he'd be terribly upset if he did. I found out by accident—he dropped a postcard addressed to him when he was here one night. It was just an ad from a radio supply house. He didn't seem to miss it and I didn't mention it because it was just about then, oh, maybe two months ago, that he began acting so mysteriously."

"Myshkin?" I said. "Mysteriously?"

"Well," she hesitated, "he seemed so . . . so furtive and . . . and troubled . . ." She gave it up with a little shrug. "Oh, you know how he is, even ordinarily."

"Let's not take anything for granted," I said. "How is he?"

"Wouldn't you agree he's—well, eccentric?"

"Eccentric?"

She smiled politely. "You know, people disagree about those things. I really don't know him very well."

I shook my head. "I don't get it. You'd have to know him pretty well to think he's eccentric. Of course, he drinks Slivovitz and beer, and he makes surrealist movies, and he likes to play with color wheels—but that's not what *you* mean," I said, "is it?"

"I'm really not sure what I mean," she said.

"You said he comes here?" I said.

"He's been here several times. He comes for the rent and to copy some of the things he left on the walls in the darkroom. He asked me not paint the darkroom. He asked me not to paint over them until he's through."

"On the walls?" I asked.

"Please."

I followed her to the darkroom. She opened the door and turned on an overhead light. Myshkin's cabinets and shelves and work tables were still there, but the equipment was new to me. Two walls were freshly-painted ivory, but the other two, meeting in the corner where Myshkin's enlarger had stood, were the same old seasick green. The green walls were just about covered with notes and

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"Long time no see," said Boris *(page 99)*

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figures and diagrams. I didn't even try to work them out. They'd been put down with pencil, ink, crayon—as if the writer had grabbed anything handy.

"Miss Hopper, this really beats me," I said. "Myshkin was no wall-writer when I lived with him, but that's his handwriting. Is this what he comes to copy?"

"It's the only logical conclusion," she said. "He goes in here by himself and he closes the door. Sometimes he stays a minute or two, but once he stayed more than an hour. What else would he do in here? Siphon my hypo or something? Why doesn't he want these two walls painted? There wasn't anything on the others."

"Now tell me he copies the stuff in the dark," I said.

She laughed with me as we went back to the living room, but she said, "Maybe he does. I hear him switch on the light after he goes in and before he comes out, but maybe he unscrews the bulb," and she laughed again.

"I have a feeling you half mean that," I said.

"Well, ten per cent, anyway. Would you like a drink?"

"You talked me into it," I said. "Some of this might make sense after a drink."

So we had two or three drinks. She asked me about the army and I told her she was among the first half dozen pretty girls I'd seen since I got back, and she said the way I looked at her sometimes, she'd thought she was the very first. I tried Myshkin's number again and did no better. When I got ready to leave, she showed me the postcard Myshkin had dropped. It was from a downtown radio supply house, and the address looked as if it had been stencilled by one of those machines that run off mailing lists of regular customers. I decided not to ask myself what Myshkin was doing with radio supplies and felt much better. The address was: 22 Force Tube Avenue, in Manhattan, and I had no idea where it was.

"It's downtown, just outside the west border of the Village," Miss Hopper said. "It's near the waterfront, and the whole street's a single block long, and nobody knows it exists or what its name means. Anyway, nobody I've asked."

"What's the place itself like?"

"I don't know. I never went."

"Then how—"

"Oh, I happened to be looking at a map of the city streets and I looked it up. Poor Mr. Myshkin, he's so thin and haggard I sometimes feel like—"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Who's thin and haggard?"

"What a queer question!" she said.

"I got a feeling the answer's even queerer," I said. "Did you say Myshkin was thin and haggard?"

"You heard me say so," she said. "What's so odd about that?"

"You know," I said, "I've had a feeling something was wrong ever since I got here."

"Goodness," she said. "You sound just like Batman."

"I happen to be a junior G-man," I said. "The last time I saw my friend Myshkin, he weighed a slow two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Well, he must have been worrying since then," she said. "The Mr. Andrey Myshkin I know is thin and haggard. And if you're such a good friend of his, why don't you ever refer to him by his first name?"

"Who, Myshkin?"

"Yes, Andrey."

"You know him that well?"

"I said I didn't!"

"Everybody calls him Myshkin," I said. "That's the kind he is. All right. What made you keep the card?"

"Look here, you! If—"

"Please," I said, holding up a hand. "I am a troubled man. Why did you

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keep the card?"

She looked at me quizzically, then she said, "Because it seemed like a good idea to know where I could find my landlord if I needed him for anything important."

"Am I important?"

"Important in what way?"

"Important to you, Miss Hopper," I said. "Does my nearness thrill you? Think before you answer, but please say yes, Miss Hopper. I am madly in love with you and would carry you off now, if I weren't sure that you are implicated in the murder of my friend Myshkin. Still, on the chance that you aren't, will you have dinner with me one night soon?"

"What happens to girls who say no?"

"Their bodies are discovered in the river."

"Then I'll be one of the yesses," she said.

"Good," I said. "Those don't even get discovered."

"Call me and let me know what happens?"

"You bet," I said.

I HAD some trouble with a cab driver because we couldn't find Force Tube Avenue, but we found it. It was one block long. It has some big warehouses and loading platforms, a few lots with half their fences gone, a fruit line's pier at the far end, and number 22. It had no number on it, but it was the only building on the block that might have had someone living in it—if, for some reason, anyone would want to.

It was a sad old red-brick house, one story high. Most of the ground floor was taken up by a large arch-shaped wooden door that had once been painted green. The sidewalk in front of it sloped to the gutter and was paved with small cobblestones, and from that and the large door, I guessed there had once been a small stable or maybe a blacksmith's shop there. To its left there was a narrow wooden door with a brick step before it and grass growing around the brick. On one of the doorposts there was a rusty mailbox and an old-fashioned doorpull. There wasn't any name on either of them.

I yanked the pull and stepped back. The street was empty and quiet, but I could hear voices and machinery from the pier. The sun was warm and there were gulls in the sky.

There were two big windows in the upper story, both completely covered with black shades. I yanked the pull again a few times and listened at the door.

Suddenly it opened and there stood Myshkin. Don't ask me how I recognized him. He was unquestionably thin and haggard. He stood in his socks, wearing trousers much too big for him, and an undershirt. He hadn't shaved in days and his thick black hair looked wild. He stared at me with bloodshot eyes that were full of sleep. Then all at once his worn-out face looked happy and he grabbed my hand. "It's Henry! It's really Henry!" he cried. "Come in! Come in! Damn it, what time is it? Don't stand there!"

He was shivering and I went in quickly. When I closed the door behind me, everything was pitch dark inside, but Myshkin kept pumping my hand as he led me up a slanting flight of wooden stairs to a large room upstairs. "Three-thirty?" he kept saying. "What? How could that be? I set my clock. That's terrible, not meeting you. Three-thirty? I can't understand it, on my word."

"It's all right, Myshkin," I said. "You look tired."

"I'm not surprised," said Myshkin. "Sit down. Smoke. Talk."

We lit cigarettes and he went to let the window shades up halfway, still jabbering. I took a quick look around the

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place. It had a few beat-out pieces of furniture, a rusty sink, a grimy gas range, an open bathroom (the door hung askew on one hinge) with a tiny tub, and two rear windows that were covered with black tar-paper. Up front, most of the room was taken up by a huge, new-looking, unpainted wooden work table that ran around three walls. It was littered with electronic tubes and dials and odd delicate bits of machinery, as if somebody had been disemboweling cameras and radios and who knows what else just for the hell of it. Over the table there were three continuous stepped shelves that overflowed with vats, jars, cans, cartons and boxes. Near me there was an unmade studio bed with a torn sheet and naked pillow. More pillows were piled in a chair, half burying a telephone and an alarm clock.

I pointed to the pillows. "Maybe that's why you didn't hear the clock or the telephone," I said. "Myshkin, I never saw you look so tired."

"I just wanted a nap," he said, coming back and tossing the pillows on the bed. "I'm ashamed, you waiting there, Henry. How many times did you ring? You rang this number, didn't you? Sure, the operator would give—"

He broke off abruptly, let the last pillow drop back on the chair and looked at me. "How did you know I lived here?" he asked.

"Military intelligence," I said.

"How did you know?" he asked again, and his voice dried out and caught in his throat. He sounded badly frightened and his eyes gleamed a dull smokey orange like a cat's. He didn't give me a chance to answer. *"Who sent you?"* he said in a crazy, croaking whisper.

"Myshkin, what the hell is the matter with you?" I said.

He started nodding and kept it up as he backed off until he came up against the nearest end of his work table. He sneaked a hand up behind him and kept it there as he came toward me again. All this time he was talking in a small, hurried voice. "It's nothing, Henry, on my word. I'm a little jumpy these days, that's all. Tired, that's what it is, just as you said . . ." By then he was close enough to swing at me with the heavy flash-gun he'd hidden behind his back.

He started to swing. I swayed a little to one side and got a hand up to where it would catch his wrist, and his arm froze. We stood there like that for a couple of seconds with our eyes locked —Myshkin ready to brain me, one of my hands open and the other a fist. Maybe the first did it. He looked at it and his arm fell limply to his side. The flash-gun dropped out of his hand and banged to the floor.

"I'm tired, Henry," he said. "Pooped. . . ."

He was trembling. I led him to the bed, sat him down and threw a thin blanket over his shoulders. It hung on his shivering bones and shivered with him. Then his breathing began to calm, and after awhile his eyes closed and he fell back and slept.

"Welcome home," I said.

BUT Myshkin had to explain. What he really wanted was to hit me over the head and bury me in the yard, but he would have been satisfied to pack his stuff and disappear. He couldn't connect with my head, and he had too much stuff to pack—not to mention certain things that couldn't be packed anymore —and if he'd known where to disappear, he couldn't afford it. That was why he had to explain.

It wasn't just that he had all my savings. I'd had clothes, books, records, some of my own furniture, and half an apartment. It wasn't easy coming home to find everything gone.

"Hocked, sold, gone," Myshkin told

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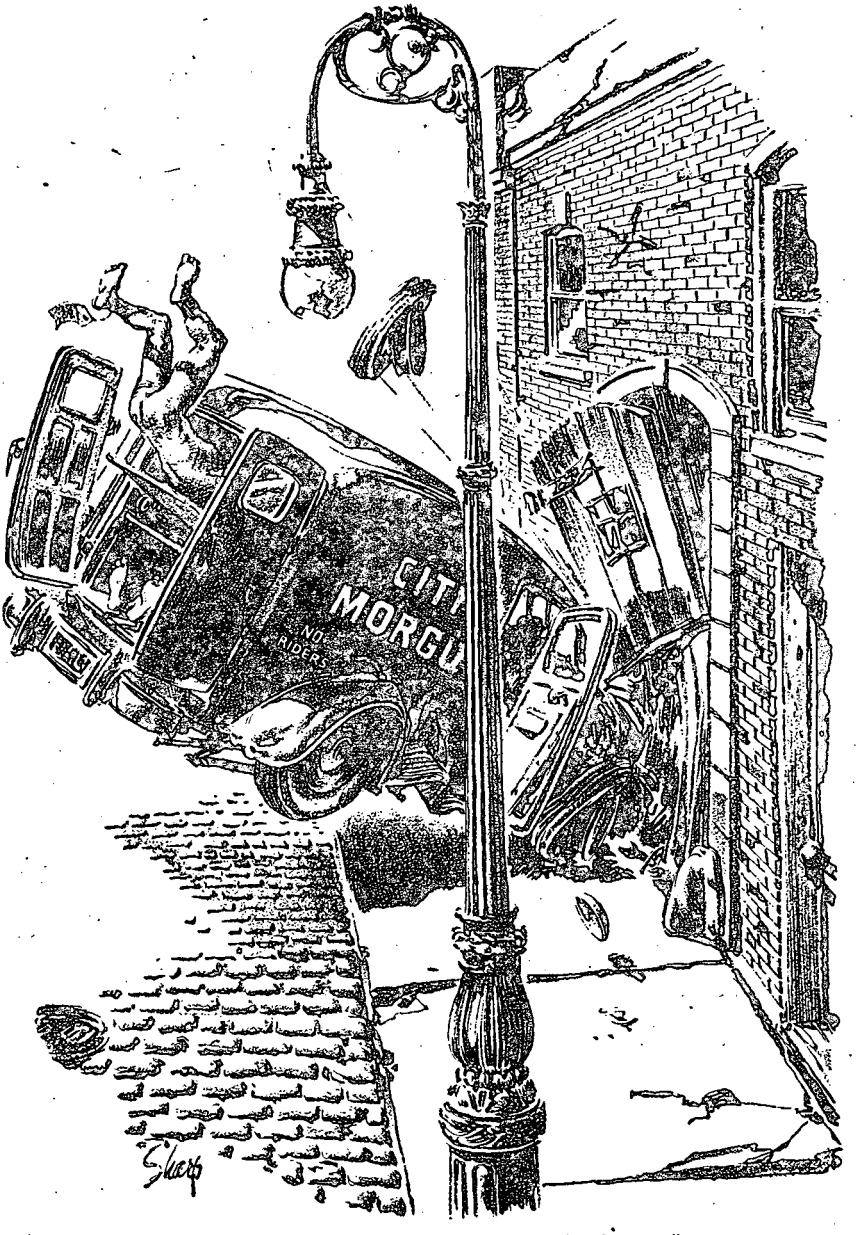

"Suddsy's truck smashed its way through the wooden door . . ." *(page 116)*

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me. Tears were running down his face. "Every goddam thing. That painting Eagle gave you—I got a hundred and ten bucks for it from Siegman. The French prints, forty each. Hock shops, art dealers, hot goods specialists. Anywhere I could raise a dime. Furniture, the works. I kept an account." He wiped his nose and went on wringing his hands. "Call the cops," he wept.

"What about my bank balance?"

"You think I would sell your things if there was any money in your account?" he asked. The thought added enthusiasm to his weeping.

"The whole three thousand?" I asked.

"Gone, gone: The bonds too. Call the cops."

"But where did it all go?"

"Experiments. My experiments."

"What experiments?"

At that he took hold of himself. He looked away from me and dried his eyes. "I'm hungry," he said. "Haven't eaten all day. What time is it?"

"Almost seven."

"I'll make eggs," he said. He got off the bed and wrapped the blanket around him. He'd slept three hours and wakened with a nightmarish yell that made me jump a foot out of the chair I'd sat in.

He turned on the big unshaded bulb that hung from the ceiling by a black wire. It threw his shadow around on the walls in grotesque masses.

"Eggs," he wailed, as he went to the gas range.

He opened the oven compartment and took out a massive loaf of black bread, some lard, coffee grinds, a can of chili, a frying pan and a misshapen percolator.

He began feeling inside some of the cartons and boxes on the shelves over the work table, and presently he found an egg in one, two in another, and came away empty-handed from the rest.

"Three lousy eggs," he wept, dragging the blanket back to the gas range. "New hideouts, for what? Three eggs!"

"Why don't we go out to eat?" I said. "Nice clams?"

He shook his head. "Don't worry, they're fresh." The tears cascaded down his sunken cheeks and the head-shaking scattered moisture over the dust that lay half an inch deep around his socks. "That's one thing about the goddam eggs around here."

Finally I asked: "What's all this talk about eggs?"

He was crying so bitterly, maybe he didn't hear me.

"I left my Washington job July 1st," Myshkin told me while he smoked. "I couldn't have gone on much longer anyway. Worked there all day and at home all night. You know what I was doing?"

"Aerial survey research, wasn't it?"

"Close. We put together different shots and worked out three-dimensional layouts of terrain. Great stuff, but I was dead on my feet. Dizzy spells, nausea. And I had this thing on my mind all the time."

"What thing?" That's the third time you said that."

"Time and money, that was what it needed. What did it matter if I had to hock, sell or borrow? Of course, you realize you're a partner?"

"How generous. A partner in what?"

"Is the coffee still warm? Pour me some."

"When are you going to tell me?"

"At once. Where are my shoes? It's absolutely filthy down there. Henry, I'm glad you're back. I realize now what I've needed all along is someone to talk to. This way, it's downstairs. Finding this place was a stroke of luck, on my word."

He led the way down the sloping stairs, groped along an unlit narrow hall

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and unlocked a door that opened a single room of approximately the same dimensions as the one above. When he turned on a wall light, I saw that the place had indeed once been, as I'd guessed, a blacksmith's shop. For that matter, it might still have been one. The recessed forge up front looked recently used, and there were two anvils and a bellows, some hammers and tongs in position near it. But that was a later impression. My first one was all color—green and yellow.

There were a great many things in the room: a lathe, a diemaker's bench, innumerable small tools, a jeweler's eyepiece, rolls of blueprints, sections of steel tubing, spindles of copper wire, and so on. All of these, and everything else in the room, including the walls, floor and ceiling—with a single exception—were covered with a thin layer of very fine, pale yellow powder that had an obviously adhesive property, as soft to the touch as cornstarch.

The exception was a large, mysterious object in the center of the room, completely draped with yards of green silk, like a strange monument. The green silk, even where it touched the floor, was the only thing free of the pale yellow powder.

Whatever it was, under the silk, it had a circular base perhaps ten feet in diameter, and tapered gradually to a height of about seven feet. Its apex was also a disc, a foot across. It looked, well, like an up-ended, blunt-nosed shell for some incredible mortar.

I let my breath out softly and caught Myshkin looking at me with the predatory expression he'd had five hours earlier, his eyes as luminous as a tiger's.

"Now, Myshkin," I said gently.

"I have suffered," he said. "It leaves its mark on a man. I have never shown this to anyone. I keep thinking someone knows about it. It is possible someone knows."

"I know someone who wants to know," I said. "Me."

"I keep forgetting," Myshkin sighed. "Give me a cigarette." He took a cigarette and a light. "You see this machine?"

"Is that what's under the green silk?"

"The Myshkin Photosculpt. Of course, the fact that your name is not used does not affect your full partnership. Prepare yourself."

Solemnly he walked the few steps to his creation. Gathering a fold of the green silk, in a voice of restrained emotion he announced: "The Myshkin Photosculpt," and unveiled the machine.

I stared at it. It looked like nothing so much, all in all, as a large, queer bird cage. Its projectile-like form was given to it by its framework of steel ribs and tubing, but that was the least of it. I walked closer and began to see detail. Later, on, when I had to answer questions about it, and it was a little fresher in my mind, they wrote down what I said. I'll quote from it:

"There was no bottom to the cage. It was mounted on three small wheels able to move in any direction. The vertical ribs were steel supports for the rest of the cage. The horizontal ribs were actually a continuous, slowly-ascending spiral made of steel tubing. The tubing had been cut open and parted, forming a rail. Three of these rails were side by side, spiralling up. They led to the apex of the cage, where the machine itself, you might say, hung suspended.

"This machine was more or less rectangular, a box-like affair about three feet long by two wide. It seemed to be made of sections of many metals besides steel, including aluminum, brass, lead, silver, and there were knobs of black hard rubber, and tiny cones that were gleaming gold spikes. On the long side that faced the inside of the cage, there

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were at least half a dozen lenses of different shapes and sizes, some with a great many minute facets. They were surrounded by jeweled dials, meters, gauges and silver switches.

"The back of the box had three sets of small flanged wheels to fit the spiral rails. The top of the box held a shallow steel funnel a foot in diameter. It emptied into a wide copper tube that plunged directly into the box, emerging from the two remaining long sides in a dozen or more intricate copper coils. The bottom of the box held a steel knob as wide as the upper funnel . . ."

There was probably a lot more I didn't remember even then.

Anyway, after awhile Myshkin said, quietly: "Well, Henry?"

"Myshkin, what does it do?"

"What does the name sound like it does?"

"I don't know. I'm overwhelmed."

"You think this is something? You ought to see the works inside." He shook his head dreamily from side to side, eyes half closed. "I consider this an absolute marvel," he murmured. "In all modesty." He dropped his butt and ground it out with a heel. A few grains of the yellow powder had caught briefly, giving off an acrid odor.

"Originally," said Myshkin, "I began with a machine that was a camera capable of working in three dimensions."

"Yes . . ."

"In its basic form, the machine will photograph a given subject from every angle, depending on the relative positions of the subject and the machine. For instance, I place a table inside the frame. On the table I put a box. The machine will now photograph the four sides of the box and its top—since the machine is, at the start, on a higher level than the box. If I suspend the box within the frame by a string, keeping it at the same height, the machine will now also photograph the under side. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Nothing," said Myshkin, scornfully. "A box is simple. Its sides and surfaces are flat. But suppose I stand a champagne bottle on the table. Now the machine will photograph *around* the bottle. If I suspend it, it will also photograph the bottom of the bottle. Depending on how I set the machine, it will do this merely by dividing the roundness into so many flat sections. You understand?"

"I'm not sure."

"Think of it this way," said Myshkin. "We have a label encircling the bottle. On it we print numbers running from one to fifty. An ordinary photograph will take perhaps from one to ten. Eleven will be distorted, twelve beyond view. But the machine will take a continuous, undistorted exposure of all the numbers from one to fifty. Actually, it is taking a series of ordinary photographs joined to make one. It does this by moving around the bottle—just as it photographed the box by moving around it. Look here . . ."

Myshkin flung the green silk drape to me and turned to his machine. Reaching up to the box within the cage, he unfastened a cable and stepped back.

The large rectangular box began to roll slowly down the gentle spiral of the rails. The lenses remained trained on the interior of the cage. By the time it had lowered itself a foot, it was halfway through its third circuit. Myshkin stopped and anchored it there.

"You see?" he asked, and when I nodded, he said with a little smile, "You look disappointed."

"It's a clever gadget," I said.

Myshkin's smile turned into a sneer. "A clever gadget! Bah! I am talking about a product of genius. What do you see here? A lousy machine that circles a subject and takes a lot of little expo-

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Gladys dashed down the street hotly pursued by a pair of trousers. (page 117)

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sures on a continuous film. What does this do that a movie camera doesn't do a hell of a lot better, with less trouble?"

"I'll bite."

"Thanks," said Myshkin. "Now listen to me. I've told you what this machine would do in its basic form, as a camera. But it is not a camera. It is a machine that makes three-dimensional reproductions of what it sees. I am not talking about *views* of three dimensions. *I mean solid matter.*"

"Huh?"

"Good," said Myshkin. "Jump again. I like it."

"What kind of solid matter?" I said.

"Any kind. Whatever you feed it, as long as it's malleable."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Jump," said Myshkin. "They'll all jump." He waved a hand at the machine. "What is it to photograph around a bottle? Is a photograph three-dimensional? No. A million photographs. Bah! What I wanted was a duplicate of the box or bottle. A small one, perhaps, but an actual representation. If the bottle had rough glass, I wanted to *feel* it. If the box had a dent in it, how could I see it unless the dent managed to pick up a shadow? Remember, originally I was thinking of something to eliminate the camera, and to hell with all that juxtaposing hundreds of flat shots. I wanted a machine—well, let's say something you could take up in a plane, focus on the terrain, and get—you know what? Ask me!"

"What?"

"A relief map, that's what! The size depending on the machine and its focus! With lenses that would focus so automatically that infinity would start at a hundredth of an inch from the machine. No worries about depth! And with infra-red, so even an absolute minimum of light would—"

"The machine actually works with solid matter?"

"Anything malleable. Anything that can turn solid. Even water, if I freeze it fast enough! Three-dimensional images of three-dimensional objects!"

"But how, Myshkin?"

"Give me a smoke," said Myshkin. "Light it for me. You got me more excited than I've been since those early days, before . . ."

He broke off suddenly. His face, so flushed and animated a moment before, became the pallid, weary mask it had been when I'd watched him sleeping. His hands trembled so violently that he dropped the cigarette I gave him. Again there was a brief whiff of something sharp and choking before Myshkin stamped out the sparks burning in the yellow powder. I lit another cigarette for him and he smoked while he talked.

"I started with rags and paper." His voice had lost its edge. "I learned how to compress the stuff, then I tried other materials — things like sawdust, then cheeses, gelatins, then plastics and plastic wood, then plaster of Paris, clay mixtures, and finally metals. Anything I could melt. I could put you in the cage and do a bronze bust of you up to thirty inches tall and fifteen deep. Or a full figure of the same size, depending on the focus. You begin to understand what I have here?"

I nodded, playing with the silk drape in my hands.

"You begin to see its commercial possibilities?" Myshkin went on, enthusiasm rekindling his eyes. "Not only maps in full, absolutely authentic relief; not only perfect duplicates of the greatest sculpture and statuary; not only three-dimensional portraits of heads, busts, the tape, fighters at the instant a punch is knocking down one of them; not only magnificent scale models of ships, buildings, whole cities . . . What's the matter, Henry?"

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"Nothing," I said. "I'm just trying to think."

"Henry, you don't have to kid me. You don't believe what I'm saying, do you? Don't be polite; skepticism is healthy. Tell me, I'm just standing here talking to myself. Right?"

"Myshkin, if you were in my place—"

"Fine!" said Myshkin, clapping his hands together and rubbing them briskly. "We'll try a little plaster of Paris. That always works quickly and I have some down here."

He went to the die-maker's bench and brought back a large can marked *calcium sulphate*. He blew off some of the yellow powder from its lid, opened it and gave it to me to hold.

"Put the drape down" he said. "Anywhere. It won't dirty."

"This plaster of Paris is all solid," I said.

"It could be concrete," said Myshkin, turning to the machine. "Ever see those high-centigrade ovens mechanical dentists use to bake porcelain? Nothing, on my word." From the back of the machine he began to uncoil a thin cable bound in green silk, until it reached a wall socket near the forge. "Sometimes it blows a fuse. Don't be startled." He slid apart a latch on one of the vertical ribs of the cage and one section swung open on hinges. "Get ready," he said.

"For what?" I said.

Myshkin touched a switch on the machine. The light flickered, the machine hummed and began rolling up the rails to the top of the cage. On its way up, tiny bulbs in its dials and gauges began to come on in red and blue and amber and violet and the copper coils began to glow hot orange. When the machine reached the top, it stopped with a faint click. Myshkin took the silk drape I still held, threw it down on the die-maker's bench and brought back a stool and a fruit box six inches high. He went into the cage, put the box down on the floor in its center, then came out and took the can from me. Using a pick and a sharp-edged chisel, he cracked and crumbled the solidified plaster of Paris, got up on the stool and shook the chunks into the steel funnel on top of the machine. It took him a few minutes to get as much as he wanted. Then he put the can down, got up on the stool again, turned to me and pointed to the cage.

"Step inside," he said.

"Inside there?"

"On the box. We'll have a pedestal for the figure."

"What figure? You mean you're going to make a figure of me?"

"Any pose, any expression—try to look skeptical. Fine!"

"Listen, Myshkin, if you don't mind —"

"Henry, once and for all, get in there."

"What if I don't?"

"That's the last you'll ever hear about this," he said evenly.

I entered the cage and got on the box. Myshkin stuck his hands in through the ribs and his fingers flickered over the dials. The machine's lenses were no more than a foot away from my eyes. The little colored lights seemed very bright. Myshkin touched a final switch, pulled his hands out and closed the cage.

The machine was rolling down the rails. It moved slower under power than it had when gravity had pulled it. As it rolled past my eyes and approached my profile, one by one the lenses gleamed and turned opaque and were gone.

"It's on low speed," said Myshkin. "Don't move much."

The advice was superfluous; the machine had me rooted. The lenses came around from behind me, reversing the order in which they had disappeared, first flashing opaque beams and then

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absorbing the color all around them. The copper-orange coils held a touch of pink. The red bulbs winked on and off in pairs and groups. The air was filled with transparent globules of color after the machine had passed me again. Gradually the humming died away, and the sound of blood rushing past my eardrums filled in the silence. The pink copper had soft violet halations obscuring its coils. The topmost lenses had slid down past the level of my eyes, and as I grew calmer, sweat ran down my face and I felt my arms and legs again.

I don't know how long it took. Probably two or three minutes, but there was an amazing interval between Myshkin's first and last words when I heard him say, "All right, Henry, that's it." He had my hand and was leading me out of the cage.

I stood outside, holding one of the steel ribs. Myshkin went into the cage and squatted before the stationary machine. It had stopped a foot from the ground. He turned the steel knob at the bottom of the machine until he had it loose. Then, sliding the knob out from under an apparent opening there, he substituted his free hand, as if to catch something that would drop out of the machine.

The next instant his body went rigid. The slight, expectant smile he'd worn remained fixed, but it suggested an embalmer's handiwork. Slowly, his hand—the most reluctant hand I ever saw—came out from under the machine, and we both looked at what lay in his palm.

It was an egg. An ordinary, medium-sized one.

A shudder swept through him. The egg rolled off his palm and dropped the few inches to the floor. It didn't break. He looked down then and stared until the egg stopped rolling.

"*ANOTHER ONE!*" he roared, head thrown back, throat muscles swollen, shaking fists at the air. "*ANOTHER ONE, DAMN THEM!*"

Then he had burst out of the cage and was running around the room. He overturned everything that stood upright, flinging tools aside, kicking and flailing at everything in his way. He seized a huge, long-handled wrench and smashed cans and boxes, scattering the fragments, and the yellow powder rose in billowing clouds to fill the room before he rushed out.

I heard him go tearing up the stairs and the house shook with the sounds of his feet, and with scores of objects being flung about. A few minutes later he bounded downstairs again. The front door opened and crashed against a wall and his footsteps were gone.

I went down the hall to the front door and stepped outside. The street was silent and there was no sign of a tall, emaciated man in oversized pants and and undershirt. The wind that blew in from the river was cold and I went back in.

The dust was settling in the downstairs room. I pulled the cable out of the wall socket and covered the machine with the green silk drape. Then I turned out the light and closed the door behind me.

The upper story was a shambles. I righted a chair and sat in it and tried to think. After awhile I realized I wasn't scared anymore. It was almost ten-thirty by Myshkin's handsome alarm clock when I ran out of cigarettes. I found my cap and left the house. The street was still deserted and very quiet.

I DIDN'T know I was on 52nd Street until I began passing the swing joints. They were just beginning to come alive, but after a beer I kept walking east until I came to the house where I'd lived with Myshkin.

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The fourth floor windows that had been ours were lit, so I went into the tiny lobby. The elevator boy was in a corner with a pretty brunette, but when he saw me he grinned. "Hi, soldier, back again?" and chucked the girl under the chin before he came to the elevator. "Four D?"

"Well, I don't know," I said. "Kind of late, huh?"

"For one of Miss Hopper's parties? Are you kiddin'?"

"Oh, is there a party up there?"

"Alla time, *allla* time. C'mon."

"I wasn't invited," I said, stepping into the elevator.

"Who was?" he said.

As soon as I rang, a large man with a six-inch black beard and a plaid shirt and a tall drink in one hand opened the door. "Hallo!" he cried heartily. "You're late! Everybody's been asking for you, especially Gladys. Not Gladys? You look like one of hers. Well, come in, will you? Not frightened by this, are you?" He waggled a hand under his beard. "Don't have to wear a tie, hah hah! Very clever of you! Keeps me warm in winter and cool in summer. Stop, you're killing me!"

As I started to go in, I heard Harriet's voice calling, "Was there someone at the door?" The beard turned and she saw me. I closed the door and waited for her.

"Hello, Henry," she said, taking my hand and squeezing it and smiling a friendly but somehow special, somehow troubled smile. "I'm so glad you came. I was wondering if you would. I thought you might. Henry, this is Roscoe. Roscoe, be an angel and see about the ice cubes. The tray's stuck again and no one seems!—"

"So he's yours?" cried Roscoe. "Say no more; I understand, but will Gladys? He's very witty, too. Hup! Not a word."

Harriet watched him go swaying down the corridor.

"I'll be so grateful when his play closes and he gets rid of that horrid beard. It does things to his character. He's really very sweet. Roscoe Cramwell, didn't you recognize him? *Virtue, So What?*—the psychiatrist, it's driving him mad. Oh dear, listen to him, he's destroying my poor refrigerator. You do want to talk, don't you? It's in your eyes. They're so . . . so very . . ."

"Confused?"

"Silly. I mean it, Henry. *Triste,* that's it."

"You sound different. Been drinking, huh?"

"Goodness, just wee sips of this and that. I'm the barman. You're the one who's been drinking, haven't you? Was it that bad? You knew he was here, didn't you?"

"Knew *who* was here?"

"Why, Mr. Myshkin, of course."

"You mean Myshkin's here?"

"No dear. I mean he *was* here."

"In his underwear?"

"Henry, you mustn't say things like that. Would you like some black coffee? Nice hot black coffee?"

"Harriet—if I may call you Harriet?—"

"Of course, dear."

"Thank you, Harriet, I've had some beer but I don't need or want any nice hot black coffee. I didn't know anything about Myshkin's being here. He ran out of his house earlier tonight, and the last I saw of him he was in an undershirt. He must have grabbed a coat or—"

"A sweater. A great big ugly green thing with a hood."

"Whatever it was—"

"But if you didn't know, what made you come here?"

"I don't know. I started walking and here I was. The lights were on and I thought . . . I don't know what I thought. I'm here, that's all. Now please

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tell me about Myshkin. How long ago did he leave? What did he want?"

"He was very odd. Fortunately, there weren't many people here when he burst in—"

"What time was that?"

"Nine-thirty or so. He was carrying that large wooden box—"

"What box?"

"Really, dear, you must be more polite."

"I'm sorry. What about the box?"

"It's more like a case, really. It has a handle, and some holes in the sides. Like the ones people use to transport pets, you know? He's brought it here before. 'Miss Hopper, I'll be in the darkroom awhile,' he said. 'Don't bother me and don't snoop.' Well, he stayed there until half an hour ago, except that he came out once shortly after he'd gone in. He said he wanted some pencils and paper, and before I could stop him he'd taken a handful of my best notepaper. You know, Henry, he rather frightened me."

"That's all, huh? He didn't say anything when he left?"

"Not to me, dear; I was in the kitchen. But Roscoe says he startled some friends of his here who saw him leaving. You must know them . . . let me think —yes, and Roscoe says he made off with a quart of my Scotch, but that's probably no more true than the noises he said he'd heard from the darkroom—"

"Darling, *there* you are!" a delighted feminine voice called.

A very pretty redhead came swinging down the corridor to us.

"What's this about noises?" I asked.

"Oh, some barnyard thing," said Harriet. "Now do be polite, dear. Gladys, darling, this is Henry. He's just back from overseas."

"A barnyard thing?" I said. "How do you do?"

"Darling, that's a terrible thing to say to me," said Gladys.

"Darling, he was talking to me," said Harriet.

"Darling, that's a terrible thing to say to you," said Gladys.

"Darling, you don't understand," said Harriet. "Henry's very sweet. He doesn't say things like that. Now say you forgive him."

"For what?" I said.

"Never mind, darling," said Gladys, resting her head on my chest and putting my arm around her waist. "I forgive you."

"Thanks," I said. "What about the darkroom?"

"Heavens!" Gladys shrieked. "When did you get off the boat?"

"*Darling!* He's talking to *me!*" said Harriet.

"Then why is he pinching *me?*" asked Gladys.

"*Is* he, darling?" said Harriet. "If you have any further questions, lieutenant, you can just mail them to me."

"Harriet, wait a minute!" I called. "Gladys, let go!"

The last we heard from Harriet was a low, congealing laugh.

"Heavens, did you ever hear anything *like* that?" said Gladys. "Is it possible her voice is changing? How ghastly. Let's get a drink, shall we, darling?"

"If you're out of opium, darling," I said.

"Darling, I'm so happy I *found* you!" she shrieked.

Well, that was Gladys—Gladys Gwendolyne De Winter, her full name was. I got to know it pretty well, the way things turned out. Gladys was a girl of rare and varied talents, but I might have lost her right then if it hadn't been for a lucky circumstance. The lucky circumstance was my old friend Al Siegman.

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Gladys hooked my arm and off we went to join the party. The living room was loaded with guests and the guests were loaded, and it was so noisy that I didn't hear Siegman calling me until he gave my spine a resounding slap of greeting.

The last time I'd seen him, Al had been starting his first year of residency at New York Hospital. He was still here, and as sleepy and happy and bored as ever, and we shook hands for five minutes and talked.

It turned out he'd come to the party with Arnold Eagle, who knew Harriet Hopper, and he and Eagle were the friends Harriet hadn't been able to remember—the ones Myshkin startled. I tried to get Al to talk about Myshkin, but he was badly distracted by Gladys, and he addressed his remarks to both of us.

"Sure he startled us," he said. "He must've lost sixty pounds and his tongue. He didn't say a word when he saw us, just started to run. Listen, baby, I have a uniform too—a nice clean white one. I just don't wear my medals. So Eagle went after him. He lent Myshkin a Graflex last spring and hasn't seen him since. Gladys, baby, are you neurotic? Then he came back and said Myshkin disappeared down the stairs, clucking at him like a hen—what's the matter?"

I said: "You said *clucking* like a *hen?*"

"Eagle said that. What's wrong?"

"Let's find Eagle. Al, it's important." I tried to pry myself loose from Gladys. "Be nice and squat somewhere," I begged.

"Darling, you're not *listening,*" she said. "Is Eagle a chubby thing with red cheeks? He took me into the darkroom to analyze my handwriting, and now he's in there with someone else. I'll wait, darling. I barely escaped last time."

We found the darkroom locked. Al pounded the door, then spoke into the keyhole, and Eagle's voice came through the door angrily.

"Don't bother me. Go find a girl named Gladys. She has a tremendous G loop. I'm busy."

"Open up, Eagle," I called. "It's me—Henry."

The door flew open, a girl flew out, and Eagle cried: "Henry!"

So it started all over again, the handshaking and the excited talking. I was glad to see him, and it took me a few minutes to get to Myshkin. But there it was. Myshkin had leaped down the stairs, lugging his box, and all Eagle had heard was a loud clucking.

"Cutt-cutt cutt-awk!" Eagle said. "What could it mean?"

I took him into the darkroom and asked him about the writing on the wall. Eagle is a first rate photographer himself, and I thought maybe he could understand some of the notes. Instead of that, he began to analyze the handwriting. Even then, I might have listened if he hadn't started by saying that they had been written by several people. As soon as I could, I excused myself and went out to find Roscoe Cramwell.

I didn't have far to go. Howling with pain, Cramwell was on all fours under the piano, trying to pull his beard loose from the grip Gladys had on it. I offered her my arm and she made the exchange with a delighted scream. Then I delivered her to Siegman—from whom only the police or sudden death could deliver her—and followed Cramwell's retreat to the kitchen.

He was combing his beard and moaning.

"I misjudged you, Henry," he sighed, surveying his reflection in a silver tray. "Look what she did to my splendid spade. Sheer orgiastic vandalism. Pay me close heed, my boy. Few realize it, but the truth is that she is as nutty as the flavorsome cashew. She likes you,

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therefore your course is clear—leave the country. I have spoken."

"Before I go, tell me something," I said. "Harriet said you heard strange noises in the darkroom while my friend Myshkin was there. What did you hear?"

"Was that a friend of yours? Henry, I give you my word he was carrying on a dialogue with a hen."

"You don't mean a *dialogue?* He was in there alone."

"A dialogue, my boy. You forget my auditory sense is an instrument of extreme sensitivity. I heard *two* voices. One was a human imitation of a barnyard fowl, but the other was unquestionably the real thing. It must have been in that box he carried, but I've wondered about it off and on ever since."

"Small wonder," I said.

"Very strange," Cramwell nodded. "Unless he's something of a poultry fancier? No? Too bad. Hmmm." He combed his beard thoughtfully. "There's always—"

He broke off as Arnold Eagle walked into the kitchen.

"What're you hiding here for?" Eagle demanded, waving a sheet of paper at me. "Harriet's looking for you. Just a minute. What do you think of this?"

I took the paper he thrust at me and looked at it. It was a sheet of good stationary that obviously had been crumpled up and smoothened out again. One one side there was a monogram of two *H*'s. Under it were several lines of writing, sprinkled with groups of numerals and symbols. It instantly brought to mind the writing on the darkroom walls. Some of it, in black lead pencil, looked like Myshkin's handwriting, but the rest, in blue crayon, was utterly and very peculiarly different; it had uneven childlike letter formations and queerly shaped word groups, with little regard for symmetry or even legibility.

The first line in pencil, read: *What about excess charges radiated by the coefficient of the enlarger?*

The second line, in blue crayon, appeared to answer: *Harmless dissipation for most part. Rest absorbed by filter.*

The third line, again in pencil: *How permanent is this?*

The fourth line, in crayon: *Depends on charge, up to 1 hour.*

There were a few more like that, just as meaningless, before the rest of the writing and apparent mathematical configurations became a solid mass of blue scrawls.

"Even you can tell there're two different hands there," said Eagle. "This is Myshkin's right? And this? All right, but whatever it is, that's the same hand that wrote among the things Myshkin wrote on the walls. I can prove it very—"

"But what *is* it?" I said. "This blue writing, I mean. It's writing, I suppose, because I'm apparently able to read it, but somehow it really isn't *writing* at all."

"Good. I saw it immediately," said Eagle. "Harriet says it's one of a few sheets of stationary she gave Myshkin tonight. There're others just like it in the wastebasket, all torn up, but they can be pieced together."

"What for?" I said.

"It's about Myshkin. You sounded pretty excited about—"

"To hell with Myshkin. I'm—"

"It's more than Myshkin," said Eagle. "Listen, to an expert analyst, a handwriting is better than a photograph. But I don't get a thing from this blue writing, just strange ideas—I don't know what myself. I looked at the walls again and found more like it. It's . . . it's something . . . ah, I'm all mixed up."

"And I'm fed up," I said. "Myshkin's crazy. He lost his mind from overwork."

"Really? How do you know?"

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"I'm too tired to go into it now," I aid, and left the kitchen. Going down ie corridor to the living room, I found Iarriet.

"There's a man outside who wants Mr Iyshkin," she said.

"A man? What does he want Myshkin or?"

"He won't say," Harriet whispered, ignificantly. "He said Mr. Myshkin ould understand if I just mentioned e was from Bellevue."

"Huh?"

"Bellevue. *You* know—the hospital."

"Where did you say he was?"

"Out in the hall. He's . . ."

"He's what? What about him?"

"He's rather a surprise. Not what ou'd expect. You'll see."

I nodded and went down the corridor, pened the front door and looked around he hall. There was no one there, and I pened the door that led to the stairway.

A fat little man was sitting on the tairs at the landing. He turned around nd looked at me as the door opened. His face was round and rosy-cheeked, is sparse hair was carefully combed nd plastered on his head, and his eyes were watery and disappointed. He wore n old blue overcoat and a red wool carf supported his small jowls. On one nee he balanced a derby. His other leg was extended and revealed checked rousers, brown shoes and tan spats.

I said: "You want to see Mr. Myshkin?"

"I mean to say I do."

"I understand you're from Bellevue?"

"Shhhhh!" He jumped up, a finger to his lips. "Easy, willya? Am I hollering everything I know about you? Where's Mr. Myshkin?"

"Would you mind telling me what it's about?"

"If I didn't mind, I'da told the dame, wouldn't I? I told her too much already, I can see that. What about it?"

I said: "You'll have to tell me what you want."

"Wrong, brother. I don't have to tell you anything. What organization do you represent anyway?" He sounded as if he would stalk away as soon as he'd finished telling me off, but he didn't go. "It's important. He knows what it is." I didn't say anything and he looked at me with mounting irritation. Suddenly his brows went up, as if a new thought had occurred to him. "Say, who *are* you?" he asked.

"I'm his partner. I live with him."

"Oh," he said, nodding encouragingly. "Then you know?"

"I might."

"Okay, I get it. I'm no cop, brother."

"No?"

"Okay, okay," he said patiently. "I don't mind. You get nervous in this line of business, you don't last long. Tell Mr. Myshkin what I look like. Tell him it's Suddsy, and I finally got good news."

"Sure," I said.

I went back to the apartment. Harriet was waiting just inside the door. I shook my head for her not to talk, and after I'd waited two or three minutes I returned to the stairway.

Suddsy frowned at me.

"Mr. Myshkin wants me to take care of it," I said.

"Then why can't he come out and say so? I don't like this, no sir, brother. What's he so leery for? I had to get his address in the phone book, but every time I call his number the operator gives me a different one to call, and *that* never answers. And why ain't his name downstairs or on the door? And why'd the elevator jockey say he don't live here no more?" He'd been talking more to himself than to me, and he shook his head. "Brother, *I'm* the one don't like it."

I said, "Well, I'm no cop, either."

He shot me a quick look and thought

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some more while he put on his derby and buttoned his coat, and then he turned to survey me with brimming, distressed eyes. "You got the money?"

"Yes."

"All of it? Four yards?"

"Yes."

He seemed unconvinced. "I don't want no trouble with that, brother. This merchandise is strictly C.O.D."

I took out my wallet and peeled four one-hundred dollar bills from the roll Army Finance had given me that morning. He looked at the money expectantly. "C.O.D.," I said. "Let's have it."

"Where do you want it?"

"Right here," I said.

"Are you kiddin'?" he said. "Here?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" he repeated, looking at me dubiously. "How do you expect to get it up here? Just take it on the elevator or what? And how about somebody sees us in the street? I'm parked around the corner and that's as close to this house as I come."

"Let me worry about that." I said.

"You don't mind if I worry too, do you? There's a house fulla people in there. What about that? Don't bother givin' me hard looks, brother. The way I understood, it was going to be some kind of side street where we could handle the deal fast."

"That's still the way it is," I said.

"You mean you want to see it before you say where it goes?"

"That's right."

"Whyn't you say so?" He blew out a breath and shook his head at me. "Brother, you got to trust *some*body *some*time. The world ain't that crooked yet. No sir, brother." He stuck his chin out forthrightly. "Okay, let's go."

We walked down the four flights to the lobby. The elevator boy was nowhere to be seen. In the street we walked east to the corner and turned south.

It was almost two and traffic was light and fast. Down on the next block there was an all night hamburger palace, but the other stores had long since closed and even the newsstand at the subway entrance was boarded up. There were two cars parked on our side of the street. One was a sedan, the other, closer to us, a small delivery truck. As we reached the truck, Suddsy stopped, then started walking again because a group of four people had come out of the hamburger joint and were walking toward us. We passed them at the corner and turned west, and when they crossed over and disappeared down the subway entrance, we turned around and went back to the truck.

Suddsy took out a bunch of keys and unlocked the cab door. He looked up and down the block casually and said, "Get in with me," and slid along the seat to sit behind the wheel. I followed him in and closed the door at his motion. There was a partition between the cab and the body of the truck. It has a lock on it and Suddsy used his keys to turn the lock, then removed them to start the ignition. He put the car into gear and we started rolling south.

He turned to me. "Just push the door open. You can feel it from here. Then tell me where we're going. Okay, brother?"

I nodded because I didn't think I could make any sound, and I turned in my seat and pushed open the partition. I couldn't see anything, and when I stuck an arm in I felt nothing but air. I lowered my hand, but in the instant it took to do it, I suddenly became aware of a hot, thick, sour odor and a faint sound of something bumping around on the truck floor.

I was holding a shoe. My hand went on to feel an ankle . . . a leg . . . a second leg, and came flying out of there so fast my elbow almost went through

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the windshield.

"Relax, brother, he can't hurt you," said Suddsy.

"Hurt me? That's a stiff!"

"What're you yellin' for? Listen, brother, he's in damn fine condition, considerin'—"

Just about then he took a look at me, and his eyes popped as round and white as golfballs. He shoved an arm past me, swung the door open and booted me out. It might have been a bad spill if he hadn't taken his foot off the gas pedal to do it. As it was, the truck slowed a little while I flew out and landed on my can, then it picked up speed and was around the corner before I could think of anything like getting his number.

There were some people around who saw what had happened, but I didn't stop to chat. I got a cab and started downtown to 22 Force Tube Avenue.

THE door was locked and the black window-shades were down, so I knew Myshkin had been back since I'd left. But as I kept ringing and pounding the door, I wondered whether he hadn't gone out again. Then I heard a high, distant shout come through the door, and the next moment the rather terrible sounds of someone rolling down a whole flight of stairs inside the house mingled with violent shouting and swearing.

The door flew open and Myshkin catapulted out of the hall in stocking-feet to whack me some good ones around the head before I swung him over my shoulder, kicked the door closed behind me and lugged him up the dark stairway to the lighted upper room.

As soon as I stood him on his feet he swung at me again, so I backed away and let him flop. He was still wearing the hooded green sweater Harriet had mentioned, and he lay on the floor panting like an old firehorse, his breath an essence of 86 proof, trying to get me in focus. I looked around and saw two quart-bottles of Scotch on the floor beside the deep chair. One was sealed, the other had an inch of whiskey left in it.

"I don' li' you," Myshkin wailed. "I real-ly don' li' you an' *I'M* gon' beat *YOU* up. 'Sss too musshh . . ."

I went to the bathroom and got a small brown bottle I'd seen that afternoon. The label said *Benzedrine Sulphate* and it was half full of tablets. I took two, got a glass of water and returned to Myshkin. By then he was blubbering and threatening to dissolve in a sea of tears.

"Take it before I knock your crazy head off," I said.

"'Ssss poison . . . gon' steal th' mssshh . . . the' *MACHINE!*"

"The incubator?" I said.

"Ssss' *not* 'nncubbrr!" he wailed. "Go dow' 'n' see whashoodid. Lef' fron' door open 'n' 'ney came in 'n' stole brueprinss. Unnerstan'? Stole summa th' brueprinsss . . ."

"They shoulda stole the brew," I said, "whoever the hell *they* are. I left the door open because you haven't got a spring lock on it and you had the key. Take these bennies before I rap you."

"Bu' they came 'n' stole my brueprinzzz!"

I clamped a hand on his nose until his mouth opened, then I dropped in the tablets and poured water down his throat. He wriggled and gurgled like a broken suction-pump but he swallowed the stuff. When I let go of him, his head bounced off the floor with a heart-warming thud and then he lay on his back with his arms and legs stretched out, making whistling noises.

I gave the room a more careful once-over. The large wooden box I'd heard described was standing under part of the work table. It could have been there before without my noticing it among the other boxes and crates, but now the holes

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in its sides meant something to me. I took it out and examined it. It was an unpainted carrier with a leather handle on one long side, large enough to hold an English setter, but the inside was upholstered with quilted green velvet.

Nothing else in the room seemed changed, but Myshkin's paraphernalia was so scattered that every small object in the room could have been re-arranged without my being aware of it.

On my way downstairs I turned on a light, then I locked the door and went to the room with the machine in it. I turned on another light and saw that the green silk covering I'd put on the machine was lying on the floor in the yellow dust, still strangely clean. The egg was gone from the floor inside the cage, and the box on which I'd stood was outside. The machine itself had been moved up its rails halfway to the top of the cage. That was all I could put my finger on.

When I got back upstairs, Myshkin was sitting up, with his back propped against the deep chair. He shook his head at me.

"As soon as you can talk," I said, "I'm going to find out if there's any rational excuse for what's going on here. As soon I decide there isn't, I'm telephoning Bellevue to send a wagon down here for you. No more experiments. Do you a world of good."

Myshkin stuck his tongue out and said, "Nnnyyahhh . . ."

"Still, you might like Bellevue," I said. "Got an old friend there, haven't you? Gentleman named Suddsy?"

"Ppipprriffizzz," said Myshkin lackadaisically.

"Think hard. Even you can't know many body-snatchers."

Myshkin squinted at me. "Him? Pfff! Some frien' . . ."

"Am I presuming? Excuse me," I said. "Naturally, when I discovered he was bringing you a corpse, I thought . . . absurd, wasn't it? I should have realized no friend would expect money for a little favor. Or does one have to kill the guy for you before you'll consider him a friend?"

"Nnnyyahhh," said Myshkin.

There wasn't much use talking to him yet, so I waited for the benzedrine to hit him. Twenty minutes later he got up and walked uncertainly to the bathroom. When he came out he gathered the coffee things and put water up to boil.

"Feel better?" I asked.

"Gettin' cold sweat." He took the blanket from the bed and wrapped it around himself. "Where dijou come 'cross Suddsy, huh?" he asked.

"I went up to our old apartment tonight, after you'd left. He came there looking for you—got the address in the phone book—and downstairs he had a truck with a stiff in it."

"Pffff!" said Myshkin disgustedly. "Now he comes. Now."

"Who is he?"

"Nobody. Works inna morgue. Bellevue morgue."

"Is that where he got the stiff?"

"S'pose. Said he'd steal one. Where else?"

"Then it wasn't anyone in particular?"

"Nyahh, jus' a body. Dijou see what condition it was in?"

"A dead condition. Why did you want it?"

"Tha' was weeks ago," he said with infinite weariness. "Weeks ago . . . too late now . . . 's much too late . . ."

"Why did you want it weeks ago?"

" . . . 'Speriments," Myshkin said faintly. He was trying to pour coffee but his hands trembled badly and the coffee spilled on the range and the floor.

Finally he got a cupful to his lips. He sipped it, staring at the floor and talking half to himself. "Shouldn't be drink' coffee now. C'n feel my skin 'spanding

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an' c'ntracting. Too much benzedrine." He looked at me over the rim of the cup with bloodshot, dilated eyes, and shook his head. "Too much . . ."

"You had too much Scotch. Stolen Scotch, isn't it?"

"I'll pay her. Needed it. Need 'nother little one now."

"No," I said. "Tell me about the stiff and the experiments. Begin at the beginning and include everything—what happened downstairs tonight, the business with the eggs, why you went the apartment and—" I waited until I had his eyes again, "—what those chicken noises meant. Start talking."

He closed his eyes and remained silent.

I picked up the telephone, got Information and asked for the number of the nearest precinct headquarters. When I began to dial once more, Myshkin spoke up softly.

" . . . You miserable fool . . . d' you know wha' you're asking?"

I hung up. "No, Myshkin. That's why I'm asking."

He came shuffling toward me and picked up the bottle he'd almost finished. "I give you fair warning," he said very quietly, making each word distinct. "Stay out of this. I don't know how far it's gone . . ." His body was moving with little jerks and starts, and I made no protest when he raised the bottle and drained it.

He put it down and took the full bottle to hold in his lap as he sank into the deep chair. After awhile he leaned far back, lit a new cigarette and talked.

He talked for perhaps twenty minutes, but he could have told me what he did in five. There were pauses and breaks in his continuity, and as he went on his speech kept deteriorating, until toward the end he was barely intelligible. He didn't really drink much, but after what he'd already had, and with his accumulated exhaustion, the whiskey pounded him with sledgehammers. Eventually it knocked him out—that and the terrible effort it took for him to go on.

Fear stared at me through his eyes when he turned his head toward me. It became almost audible itself, and the room seemed to vibrate with the stillness. It was during such a silence—coming after Myshkin's first stupefying reference to his experiments with live tissue—that I began to drink with him.

Because that was what Myshkin talked about—experiments with live tissue. Everything else, apparently, had happened as a result of those experiments. The idea—the really *big* one—had hit him just as he seemed to have reached the end of his inventive labors. Not that it was much of an idea when it first short-circuited Myshkin's conscious deliberations. But something kept bringing it back. It certainly was a hell of a thought, but in a way it was playful and simple enough to have occurred to a bright adolescent . . .

Here he was, said Myshkin, with a completely successful model of his Photosculpt. He'd resolved a million problems getting there. He'd come up with new compresson methods during the sawdust phase, learned to speed up the solidification of plaster of Paris, to melt and cool metals swiftly within the machine and they were just incidental.

He kept playing with the commercial possibilities, and they seemed endless. With a larger Photosculpt he could provide a milk company with huge statues of cows made of cheese. For medical students he could make perfect reproductions of the human skeleton in transparent plastic. Cheaper, he said. Sanitary. Dec rative instead of gruesome. For a political campaign he could produce bas-relief heads of the candidates in lightweight metals, small enough to

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be worn on one's lapel instead of old-fashioned buttons. Or entire little figures. Or big ones. Or maybe a full-size statue of an opposition candidate—made of salami! Things like that . . .

"Why not?" Myshkin had asked Myshkin.

"Elementary logic," Myshkin had responded. "Feed wood to the Photosculpt and you get a little wooden figure of a man. Use clay, you get a clay man. Lead; a man made of lead—"

"And if you tried living flesh and blood?"

"—A little, living MAN!"

I said it was a hell of a thought, didn't I?

First he needed a body. A dead one would suffice for awhile. He hadn't thought much about how he'd get himself a live body when he felt ready for it, but meanwhile that's where Suddsy came in. Myshkin had hung around the Bellevue morgue, struck up an acquaintance with Suddsy, and they'd got together on the deal.

But nothing happened for weeks and Myshkin stopped coming to the morgue. He couldn't wait. Moreover, it had occurred to him that he didn't necessarily need *human* flesh and blood. He experimented with a variety of small animals and got nowhere. Then he started a little earlier in the genesis of life, working down through foetal specimens until he switched over to oviparous possibilities. That brought him, finally, to chicken eggs.

So there was Myshkin with the eggs again.

By then I wasn't listening anymore, which wasn't hard because Myshkin was silent more often than not. That wild fear of his had him by the throat, but he fought it to babble on about the final fantastic success of his experiments with the eggs.

Then everything was swept along, as if in a murmured stream of recollections . . . of the strange new life he had created . . . of its developing antagonisms . . . the revolt . . . the secret hideouts . . . the inexplicable manifestations in the machine's behavior . . . the current plot against him . . . the ominous portent of the missing blueprints . . .

He passed out in the chair.

THE sound that woke me had stopped before I knew what it was, and the ghastly dream stopped with it. Whatever light there was in the room came slanting in from the hallway bulb, at the head of the stairs, as it had when the door opened in my dream. It was open now.

Myshkin stirred in the deep chair and moaned. When I closed my eyes the room dissolved in a bright sea of gold, but if I opened them to bring back the darkness, the dream came with it. I reached for the bottle and fire blazed in my throat and roared in my ears. I held out the empty bottle at arm's length and opened my hand. It dropped without a sound. I didn't know whether it had landed ever so gently on the floor, or whether it stayed in mid-air as I'd thought it would, but I smiled because I liked the silence in my dream, and let it continue. All but that thin, raucous voice.

The little chicken-man said, "Absolutely! He's guilty!"

"Of those murders, you mean?" I said.

"Exactly. This I find unforgivable. You agree?"

I couldn't help laughing. It was all I could do to keep from applauding. He was so perfectly a one-foot miniature of Myshkin, that when he spoke in Myshkin's rather special idiom with Myshkin's incisive gestures, he became a really wonderful parody, a superb illusion by a gifted, satirical conjurer. His

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little head was long and cadaverous, his hair an unruly black mop, his nose a distinguished blade, and even his clothes —tiny ragamuffin blue jeans, a gray flannel sweatshirt, and canvas infant's shoes —were not only much too large for him but managed to duplicate the latter-day Myshkin's seedy, disreputable aura.

"Nonsense," I laughed. "Matter of fact, the opposite is true. Far from murdering them, Myshkin is solely responsible for the creation of your kind."

"Bah!" cried the chicken-man, instantly ducking under the table as he realized how loud he'd been. Myshkin issued a feeble groan and slumbered on. The chicken-man came out and regarded Myshkin with frank hatred. He wasn't facing me but I'd already discovered what an amazing radius there was to his vision, so when he turned to look at me I knew it was for my benefit, and that the point was the lavish expression of disgust on his face.

"My friend," he said, "if we are going to get along, let us dispense with all further propaganda. Don't misunderstand me. I accept you as an honest man. Probably you are an innocent dupe of the master fiend. Still, all this fantastic talk about Myshkin having *created* us gets tiresome. On my word."

He moved a little more into the light and I saw, as I'd thought I'd seen earlier, that his hair seemed feathery, and the suggestion of hair on his face was, literally, down. And there was something odd about his bloodshot eyes, but what?

"But just look at him," I said.

"Why?"

"Haven't you ever seen what you look like?"

"Absolutely."

"Don't you think there's, well, a strong resemblance?"

"What?" he cried in quiet horror. He turned slowly to look at Myshkin, and shaking his head, turned back to me. "I assure you I would have done away with myself long ago. No, my friend, if you have arrived at a stage where you can look at that monstrous mask of wickedness and savagery, and tell me that my highly intelligent, sensitive features bear him a resemblance . . ." He kept shaking his head. "You need expert care nursing. Farewell to you, and I am off to find an ally in the outer, healthy world."

"Don't leave." I said. "I like you."

"I like you too," he said. "Strange, isn't it? I feel drawn to you, somehow —as if I owed you a good deal."

"I'll bet there's a reason for that," I said.

"Who knows?" he said. "Life is very strange. You know, I am quite young for someone with my gigantic mentality. I am not yet accustomed to the ways of the world. To be truthful, you are really the second human being with whom I have ever conversed. You're a disappointment in many ways, but I'm glad, all in all, because you've taught me that not all of you are such . . . such . . ."

"Fiends?" I said.

"Exactly. You seem quite docile, lethargic. Are you always?"

"Not at all," I said. "I'm drunk."

"Drunk?"

"Whiskey. Scotch whiskey. I had too much of it."

"You mean this? What does it do?"

"For one thing," I said, "it accounts for you."

"Yes? How so?"

"Well, it tends to produce troubled sleep, nightmares—and sometimes, in chronic cases, very convincing hallucinations."

"Ah, I see. Then you realize your talk of a resemblance is hallucination? Fine, fine!" He rubbed his hands briskly. "Remarkable insight, nevertheless. I think more of you already. But tell me: how

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can a man of any intelligence whatsoever accept even for a moment, the absurd notion that Myshkin—who is, after all, to give the devil his due, a human being—how could he possibly *create* a living, breathing, thinking, being like me?"

"Huh?" I said.

"Jump," he said. "It aids the digestion and proves that ideas have impact on you. Isn't it insane? Who is this Myshkin that *he* should be able to perform such a miracle? Here are no Merlins, or alchemists transmuting base metal to gold, or cabalistic mountain-top rituals, or bottled genii. We are dealing with the one great mystery of the universe, the stupendous secret of life. You mean to tell me that that miserable, wretched, evil-smelling, utterly useless bundle of insignificance named Myshkin found the answer?"

"Huh?" I said.

He glared at me. "Your conversation seems very limited," he said acidly. "What do you think?"

"Frankly, I never thought of it that way," I said. "It seemed to make sense when I first saw you. The egg business and so on—you said yourself he destroyed eggs and. well, I thought . . ."

"You're just babbling, my friend. Are you aware of it?"

"Well, how do *you* account for your existence?" I said.

"Hah!" he snorted. "How do you account for *yours?*"

"But I'm not unusual," I said. "I was born, that's all."

"And I was hatched, that's all!" he snapped. "Where I come from, it's considered distinctly unusual to be born. In fact, it's never done."

"Where you come from," I said. "Where is that?"

"*Where,* he asks me!" He threw his hands up in despair and his haggard features twisted in pain. "If I only knew! What do you think this is all about? Why am I talking to you? Why do I, obviously your intellectual superior, need your help? Because I don't know who I am, or where I come from. I don't even know the name for my kind of being. It must be a wonderful name, but all I know is what that murdering Myshkin calls me . . ."

". . . Chicken-man, you said it was?"

"Chicken-man!" he moaned softly. "Chick-en-man . . ."

"Please," I said. "Don't cry."

"Forgive me," he said, wiping his odd little eyes. "I've suffered so much these past weeks."

"I know," I said. "It leaves its mark on a chicken-man."

"Absolutely. You know, sometimes you're almost clairvoyant. Is this common among humans? No? That's reassuring, anyway. I wouldn't want Myshkin to catch on to my plan."

"You have a plan? Not that I'm prying."

"Don't worry," he said. "I don't trust you the least bit. I have a plan, yes, and I'll tell you what its objective is. I want to find out where I come from, and how I can return. I know it must be a long way from here—indeed, from almost anywhere in the world that humans live, or I would not be so unusual a being to you. And so far I haven't even uncovered a reference to my kind in any one of the books I've read."

"You read?" I said. "Beg pardon, I mean, where do you read?"

"In the library," he said haughtily. "Where did you think?" He indicated Myshkin with a contemptuous gesture. "You expect a moron like him to own books? He claims he sold them to finance his work on the machine."

"Ah yes, the machine. Now, Myshkin says—"

"I know what he *says,*" he said bitterly. "But where *did* he get it? Or where

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did he get the plans? Was it from that same unknown land—a far off island. perhaps, a mysterious domain—that he found the eggs that hatch into my kind? And how he manage to pervert its true function—"

"Which is . . .?" I asked.

"An incubator, naturally," he said.

"An incubator! That's just what I said!"

"Did you? That's very gratifying. I'm really very favorably impressed with you in some ways. Then you know what it's being used for, don't you? You've seen the powdered ashes of my compatriots in that charnel house downstairs?"

"You mean the yellow dust?"

"Dust!" he sobbed. "Countless innoment embryonic lives blown apart with such demoniacal violence that only dust remains! Why does he hate us so? Why won't he let us go back? If he wanted fame, wouldn't his discovery of us be enough? If he wanted wealth, I'd have consented to be exhibited like some freak, or write a newspaper column, or learn to play a harmonica and go on tour." His little shoulders shook as he wept. "He says he created us, and he destroys us. Why? Tell me why. What have we done?"

"You'll wake him up," I said.

"Never mind," Myshkin croaked. "I'm awake."

The little chicken-man leaped backward in alarm at the first throaty syllable. Myshkin stirred and his head turned toward the light and I saw his glazed, half-closed eyes.

"Beppo, is that you?" he whispered huskily.

"It's me," I said. "Go back to sleep."

Myshkin's eyelids fluttered and closed. "Oh God," he moaned faintly. "I dreamed Beppo could . . . talk . . ."

"Damn it, stop calling me Beppo!" said the chicken-man.

"Hush." I whispered. "Let's keep this between us."

"Hush my foot!" cried the chicken-man. "I've had enough of this Beppo business! It's ridiculous! What the hell am I—a mechanical toy or what? I have a name and I want to be called by it! Is that unreasonable?" He glared at me. "My name," he said, "is Boris Borisovitch Simeonof-Pishtchik."

"Quite a name," I said.

"Thank you. I chose it myself. However, Boris will do. I don't stand on ceremony."

Suddenly I realized Myshkin was awake again. He hadn't moved at all, but you could see his eyes like live coals staring at us.

". . . *You're talking* . . ." he said in a terrible whisper. ". . . I didn't dream it . . . *You can really talk* . . ."

The chicken-man smiled derisively. "You object, maybe?"

It was like knowing that I was having a nightmare, and not wanting to do anything about it.

"But you couldn't," Myshkin breathed "Even last week—"

"Ha!" the chicken-man snorted. "Last week I was only four weeks old! I had to learn, didn't I?"

". . . And tonight?" said Myshkin slowly.

"Tonight I didn't feel talkative!"

For some moments Myshkin was silent. His flickering eyes roamed the dark recesses of the room, his breathing grew calmer.

" . . So this is how it was . . . all the time I was trying to work out those notes on the walls . . . the symbols . . . the vowel inflections . . . how amusing it must have been . . . never once letting on that you could have told me everything . . . all this time while you held me back . . . all this precious time . . . gone . . ."

"So?" the little chicken-man grinned.

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"Then you're going ahead with the plan?"

"Sure. Do me something."

The next instant Myshkin shot out of his chair and I knew that I'd been awake all night. I recall it as an astonishing but otherwise unemotional sensation. It was like remaining conscious all through a terrible explosion, long after one had disintegrated.

But it couldn't have lasted very long, because I came out of it in time to stop Myshkin from putting an end to the unquestioned existence of Boris Borisovitch Simeonof-Pishtchik.

IT was almost eight A.M. before I got to Al Siegman's private little apartment on East 24th. He had no phone, so I called Eagle to get his address, but Eagle refused to give it to me. Later I found out he was afraid I had returned to the party and found that Gladys had left with Al, and that I'd gotten worked up over it. I must have sounded pretty wild over the phone. Anyway, I finally got the address.

But it was no good with Siegman. He'd had two hours of sleep and was developing a hangover, and what I was talking about didn't make very good early Sunday morning listening—to me either.

"What's wrong?" he asked, sitting up and looking me over. "Well, no point being tense with me, is there? Matter of fact, I thought you seemed a little—confused, shall we say?—last night, and after you disappeared, Eagle mentioned what you'd said about Myshkin. Something about a psychopathic ward, wasn't it?"

"Come off it, will you?" I said.

"Sure, sure. Tell you what: let's take time out until you feel more relaxed, huh?" He climbed out of bed in his underwear and went to the bathroom. He left the door open and regarded me with a warm smile while he fumbled with a bottle. "By the way, what kind of a discharge did you get from the army?"

"Believe me, I'm not crazy," I said.

"Did I say you were?" he smiled. He shook a white tablet out of the bottle and swallowed it dry. "Just relax, huh? I'm kind of groggy myself, but this benny ought to—"

"Benzedrine!" I said. "That's it!"

"Hmmmm? What do you mean by that?"

"Please stop that goddam diagnostic hmmmming and listen! I was confused a minute ago. I admit it. Is that so strange? Listen, Al. I haven't been home in a long time, and then I walk into this. I had a wild day yesterday and last night I was blind drunk. I haven't slept and I'm pooped. This whole thing is so completely insane that when I try to think about it, with that bright sunlight outside and you standing here in your underwear, I still can't be sure it happened. But there's the benzedrine. I remember I gave Myshkin some last night, and later he told me the chicken-men—the ones I've been talking about, and I don't care how it sounds—Myshkin told me they've been stealing his benzedrine. He says they're like chickens in some ways, and one of them is that they can't stay awake after sundown. All right? Now, I ask you frankly and freely—would I be capable of inventing details like those if I were nuts?"

Siegman let out a long sigh. "In other words, the crazier the story, the better proof it is of sanity?"

"Just the same, will you listen to me for a few minutes without interrupting?"

"Wouldn't you rather take a nice nap first?"

"No, I wouldn't," I said. "And while I'm talking, you get dressed. Soon's I've finished, and you're quite convinced I'm

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crazy, we'll go to Myshkin's place."

I didn't leave out a thing and I didn't get emotional. He'd finished dressing before I was through, but he sat and smoked until I said that was it. When we got outside and he asked if I wanted coffee, it was the first time in twenty minutes he'd spoken. We had the coffee in silence, but in the cab going to Myshkin's place, he brought up the writing on the darkroom walls. Did I know why it had aroused Eagle's interest?

I repeated Eagle's analysis. The wall writing was the work of several hands. On the crumpled sheet of stationery he'd found, where a dialogue had apparently been committed, I'd identified the questions as Myshkin's but the answers — scrawled, hardly legible — had been put down by a hand Eagle had also found among those on the walls. It was that hand that stopped him cold, a strange hand.

"I see," Siegman nodded. "Does that fit the rest?"

"Everything. Myshkin says the chicken-men trailed him to the darkroom, where he'd gone occasionally to consult his notes. They copied the formulas and carelessly added their own developments, until one day he spotted the new stuff. That was his first inkling that some kind of rebellion was brewing. He confronted them, tried to reason with them, but the revolt broke into the open. They ran away from him and went ahead with their plans. Only one remained friendly —the one I met, who calls himself Boris —and Myshkin thought he was a spy for them. Now and then Boris brought him bits of information, and Myshkin already knew enough to understand that something very dangerous was going on. Careful as he was with the machine, they got into his place once or twice and stole tools and machine parts. Last night, when an egg dropped out of the machine, he knew they'd been there again. He ran out and found Boris and brought him here in that box you saw him lugging—"

"So it was Boris that Eagle heard clucking like a hen?"

"Possibly, but it may have been Myshkin. Until last night he had no idea Boris could speak. He'd conducted his conversations with Boris either in writing or by signs, and lately, after weeks of intense labor, vocally — learning some of their vowel inflections. So what Eagle heard may have been Myshkin talking to Boris. That also explains the written dialogue. Myshkin had to put technical questions about the chicken-men's progress in writing, and Boris wrote whatever answers he decided to give. But there's the explanation of Eagle's reaction. He might as well have tried to analyze chicken scratches as a chicken-man's handwriting . . ."

Siegman sighed. "Tell me, where is Boris now?"

"I have no idea. I told you what happened."

"Oh yes. You saved his life and let him escape. Why?"

"Why? For one thing, last night I didn't know—as it seems apparent now —that Boris is the ringleader in the chicken-men's plan, whatever it is."

"Myshkin didn't say what he suspects their plan is?"

"No. I do know it terrifies him, especially after last night. I couldn't lock the place when I left, and Myshkin was out hunting Boris. Meanwhile the chicken-men got in, rummaged around and stole important blueprints. That was why Myshkin was so drunk when I got back. He was just about ready to give up, he said."

"What does that mean? How would he go about giving up?"

"I don't know."

"Has anyone except you and Myshkin

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ever seen these chicken-men of his? How do you think they get in and out of that darkroom—let alone traveling around New York?"

"Don't ask me," I shrugged. "Boris told me he reads at the library. Maybe they don't come out until late at—"

"How many are there, anyway?"

"I don't know; my impression is half a dozen or so."

"And every one of them looks like Myshkin?"

"*What?*" I said, startled. "I never thought of that!"

"Really? You might like thinking if you tried."

"Let's see," I said. "According to Myshkin, they'd look like whoever posed for the machine. If it was Myshkin—who else?—they should all look like him For that matter, like Boris too. But then how can he tell them apart?"

"How indeed?"

"There must be an answer . . ."

Siegman sighed, "I never doubted it. The only—"

Suddenly our cab swerved and screeched to a stop. Turning a corner, it had almost crashed into a police prowl car standing broadside across the middle of the street. Beyond it, and for several blocks down, there were more police cars, motorcycles, at least one emergency wagon and plenty of cops, many of them carrying rifles. We were two blocks and a right turn from where Myshkin lived, but before our cab could back up, a cop signalled us to stay put.

I said quietly, "Something happened to Myshkin. I feel it."

"Don't be a fool," Siegman said. "This looks big."

The cop stuck his head partway into the cab and looked us over. "Where you boys headed?"

"Twenty-two Force Tube Avenue," I said.

"What for?"

"A friend of ours lives there."

"What's his name?"

I told him and he wrote it down and told us to wait. Another cop had come up and the first one spoke to him briefly and gave him the slip he'd written on. The second cop walked down the street to where two more cops sat in a motorcycle and sidecar. The paper changed hands again, and a moment later the motorcycle kicked alive and swung around. As the first stacatto burst of its engine exploded in the riverfront quiet, every cop for blocks down quickly turned to face the sound. I watched the motorcycle until it turned into Myshkin's block, then I got out of the cab, and was surprised to see that a prowl car had unobtrusively parked a few yards behind us, cutting off the way we'd come. The cop near me caught my glance and grinned.

"Orders, lieutenant. Been some trouble and this area's closed off. These river streets, see, they're dead-ends or they go to piers and warehouses—and this being Sunday, with most of them closed, anybody comes by has to explain. They'll let you back out in a few minutes, I guess. Might even bring your friend. I didn't know anyone lived around here."

"Then this has nothing to do with my friend?"

"Hell, no." He leaned closer. "The biggest goddam robbery you every heard of. Had a ship full of gold tied up at one of them piers, and some good operators with an inside got aboard and took it off. Must've got millions."

I took an easier breath. "Any shooting?"

"All over the joint. Two dead, four wounded."

I went back to Siegman and told him. Then we heard the motorcycle coming back. A detective had replaced the cop in the sidecar. He came over and ad-

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dressed me.

"Is your name Henry Bannerman?"

"That right," I nodded.

"Come with me, please. Both of you."

Siegman said doubtfully, "Listen, Henry, suppose you go—"

"Both, both," the detective said wearily.

Siegman and I looked at each other. I shrugged, paid off the cabbie, and we followed the detective to Force Tube Avenue.

The whole block was alive. There were cops getting into a squad car in front of Myshkin's house, and others getting axes out of an emergency wagon across the way. At the foot of the street near the piers there were more police cars, and half a dozen cops with tommy-guns were coming out of a warehouse cellar. The detective let us into the house motioned us to precede him upstairs. Halfway up, a cop appeared at the top.

There were two detectives and a police lieutenant in Myshkin's wildly disordered room. The lieutenant and one detective sat on the bed and squinted at us. With no light on, even the bright morning was semi-darkness filtering through the grimy front windows. The standing detective came closer and asked, "Are you Lieutenant Bannerman?"

A furious roar came out of the corner near the sink. In the gloom I hadn't noticed that the big chair had been moved to that corner, with its back to the room, but now I realized that Myshkin was out of sight in it. I heard enough to understand that he thought I had called the cops; the rest were promises of what he would do to me and screaming pleas not to steal his machine. It increased in volume, frenzy and epithet, and finally the lieutenant put his hands to his ears and shouted something to the detective beside him.

The detective got up, tore away part of the already torn sheet and went to the corner. He leaned over the chair with the strip in his hands and Myshkin's stentorian fury was abruptly muffled, and only his labored breathing remained audible. But the astonishing lack of resistance from Myshkin could only mean that he'd been handcuffed—and probably tied to the chair.

The detective near us mopped his brow. He was a big, slow-moving man in tweeds, with harassed eyes. "Man alive," he sighed. Then he put away his handkerchief and asked me. "You live here, am I right?"

"In a way," I said, and explained.

"Let's say you live here temporarily," the detective decided. "Anyway, you were here last night and went out early this morning. What time?"

"Six-thirty or seven, I'd say."

"Hah! Kind of indefinite, isn't it?"

"My watch was broken during the night."

"Well then, maybe it was seven-thirty or eight? Why not?"

"Because I was already at Siegman's place—this is Siegman—a little before eight. That's Twenty-fourth and Second and I walked it, so that took time, didn't it?"

"Where's your watch?"

I took my watch out of a shirt pocket and gave it to him. Its crystal had shattered in my last-struggle with Myshkin and the hour hand was gone. He handed it back.

"How come you walked all the way across town?"

"If I'd known I'd be questioned about it, I might have taken a cab," I said. "As it was, I wanted to walk so I walked."

"Ahhh, the hell with it, Nulty," said the lieutenant, getting off the bed and coming to us. "Even a good theory's only a theory." He brushed a speck of lint from his uniform. "Personally, I'm

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inclined to think yours generally stink a little."

Then he turned to me. "Son, there was a hell of a mess on the pier next street to this. About half past seven this morning. Robbery. Sawed-off shotguns, submachine guns. Two men dead, maybe more. Damn serious. Now, we've gone through your stuff in those army bags, seen your papers and like that—even got some reasonable answers from Mr. Myshkin there, and we know you had nothing to do with it. What we want to know is did you see anything when you left this morning? Maybe a car, or some men hanging around near a shed or warehouse, or somebody walking down one of these side-streets. Anything like that, follow me? Well, just think a minute and see."

I tried to look as if I were thinking, but I knew it was useless, so I shook my head and said no.

The lieutenant gave a short, vigorous nod, as if my word on a matter settled it. "Now, I want to ask you a few questions about your friend, Mr. Myshkin. You've been a soldier, I don't have to give you a pep talk about loyalty, duty and like that. If you know anything, I think you'll tell us even though you're liable to incriminate a friend. Does that make sense to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Now, first: have you seen or heard anything in this house or from Mr. Myshkin that might lead you to suspect he'd be mixed up in robbery or other criminal activities?"

"No, sir."

"All right. Do you know where he was this morning?"

"What time this morning?" I asked.

"Let's say as far as you know, until you left him."

"Well, it didn't happen that way—he left me. He was in all night until . . well, five-thirty or six—it was just beginning to get light outside—and then he went out. I left an hour or so later, but he wasn't back yet."

"Then you don't know where he was after five-thirty or six?"

"Just that it was somewhere around here."

"And you don't know what he was doing?"

"No, sir," I said. The alternative was to tell him that Myshkin had been out after the chicken-man.

"I see," said the lieutenant, almost regretfully. He looked at Nulty, then back to me. "We've information that Mr. Myshkin was seen running around on the lot at the foot of this street, and the one a block north of that, and on the piers near both these streets. Does that mean anything to you?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you say you knew he was around here somewhere?"

"I thought he'd gone out for air."

The lieutenant asked, "Does he usually run around and shout at the top of his voice when he goes out for air?"

I shrugged. "Not when I knew him."

"Does he usually return covered with blood?"

"Blood?" I said. A shiver ran through me. I said, "Maybe he fell and cut himself?"

"With—his hatchet?" Nulty shot at me. "Or with that long curved Turkish knife of his?" he added, pleased with my reaction.

"I didn't know about either," I said.

"Hah! You know now," said Nulty. "Does it make any difference?"

"No."

"A man goes out to walk off a drunk, he doesn't carry a knife or a hatchet, does he?" said the lieutenant. "All right, you didn't see him take them. He hid them. But what's your idea?"

"I don't know. I just don't know."

"Talk, son. It'll go easier for you."

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"There's nothing to talk about."

"Your friend thinks there is. You heard him yelling when you came in, didn't you? He said he'd kill you if you betrayed him. He pleaded with you to remember you were old friends. What was that about? Come on!"

"Nothing," I said, exhausted. "He's got a machine downstairs he invented. He thinks I sent for you because I want to steal it from him."

"What about that machine? What does it do?"

"I don't know. He didn't trust me enough to tell me."

"Then why does he think you want to steal it? Why did he think you might call the police? What's going on here that makes him afraid of police?"

"Lieutenant—" Siegman began.

"Shut up, Al!" I said. "Keep out of this!"

But the lieutenant gave Siegman honeyed: "You wanted to say something?"

Siegman nodded. "Something about your wasting time."

The lieutenant beamed. "Why do you say that?"

"Because Myshkin's been working himself to death for months, and he's probably had what you'd call a nervous breakdown. That machine of his may be responsible, or it may just be one of the more spectacular results of his condition—but from start to finish it's stark staring nonsense. My friend Henry's too stupid to understand he won't help poor Myshkin by covering up for him, though it should be apparent by now how impossible that is. Anyway, that's why he went to me this morning, and why I came here with him."

There was a brief silence before Nulty slowly asked: "And who might you be?"

"Hmmmm," said Seigman, regarding him distantly. Then in a gentle, bored monotone he said, "I might be, and I probably am, the one person here with intelligence enough to suspect that a man who gallops around empty lots at daybreak, howling and brandishing hatchets and knives, isn't manifesting rational behavior—so I'd hardly hunt a rational explanation. However, the fact that I'm a physician may conceivably constitute an unfair advantage, for which I apologize."

The lieutenant was laughing so hard he had to stagger back to the bed and sit down again. He waved an arm toward the big chair in the corner, as if he was telling us to go there. I turned to Nulty and he said go ahead, so I went.

Myshkin was slumped deep in the chair. He'd been put into a strait jacket and his arms reached halfway around his skinny frame. His ankles were bound with clothesline and lashed to the chair. The lower half of his face was hidden by the strip of bedsheet that gagged him, but the rest of it was a mass of cuts and ugly bruises. There was clotted blood on a deep gash on his nose and bloodstains on his trousers, and his bony knees stuck out through long rips in the cloth, and the bandages on them were brown with dried blood. The yellow powder I had seen in the room where he kept the machine was all over him, and even his eyeballs were yellow under their bloodstreaks. He began to twist and heave, but he was helpless, and by the time Siegman came over, he had stopped struggling. His terrible eyes kept staring at us. I couldn't look at him.

"Easy now," Nulty said. "You want your friend jumping through windows trying to kill himself? He would've gone through that window, frame, glass and all. Charged across the room like a crazy bull. If we hadn't chucked a

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night-stick between his legs . . ." He left the sentence unfinished and kept nodding at me solemnly.

My temples were pulsing so hard I couldn't think. I said: "Lieutenant, what are you going to do with him?"

He frowned. "What if he tries another dive out the window and does it? Sure, you'll watch him and he'll be fine as soon as we're gone and like that—but what about the hatchet and that long, dirty knife? You know, I'm a cop, I got to think about things like that. He might get to worrying about the invention he's got downstairs, and the next thing somebody's hair gets parted two inches deep. Maybe it's you, maybe it's—"

"But he isn't violent—"

"Isn't he? He punched and kicked and bit half a dozen cops before we got the canvas on him. Hell, that's nothing to us, but the ordinary private citizen, he's got a right to expect us to put . . . well, to have somebody look at him, anyway."

"You don't understand," I said. "If only—"

"That's enough, Henry!" Siegman said sharply. "For your own sake as well as Myshkin's, keep this thing straight. You told me yourself he attacked you twice before you were home twelve hours. Can't you understand that these elaborate fantasies only emphasize his dangerous potential because they seem to justify his violent reactions? Do you want him to turn murderer? You see he's getting worse."

He turned to the lieutenant. "There's no question that he needs attention. I suppose you'll send him to Bellevue?"

"Yes."

"Well, one of the residents is a good friend of mine," said Siegman, more to me than the lieutenant. "I'll phone and see that he's handled gently."

When they led Myshkin out, he had quieted sufficiently to have his legs untied, and he let himself be walked down the stairs. The lieutenant said goodbye to us, and only Nulty stayed behind. He explained the police theory that the men they were after had holed up somewhere in the vicinity; the whole area would be closed until it had all been thoroughly searched. That meant we'd need permission to leave or receive visitors—if we were staying—but he would see to it that we had no trouble.

Just before he left, Nulty said, "Speaking of theories, I had one that your friend was mixed up in this robbery. It was all gold they had on that ship, you know—bullion, bars and ingots—and there was that yellow dust on your friend. Kind of golden, you might say, am I right? Hah! Well, we all make mistakes, but would you mind telling me what that yellow stuff was?"

Siegman told him that had something to do with Myshkin's machine, and they talked for another minute or two about a parallel case Nulty remembered, and then Nulty left. I was standing at one of the front windows, looking down into the sunny street, trying to get things arranged in my mind.

I had to limit my thoughts to immediate problems. There was the house and everything in it: what would I do until Myshkin came back? To ask what if he wasn't coming back was to raise the spectre behind every thought that involved Myshkin. What would happen to the house . . . to the machine . . . to the products of the machine . . .

I could hear Siegman's voice again. "Henry, how long do you think we'll be here? I'll call the hospital now, but I'd like to leave a number where I can be called back."

I didn't answer him.

"Listen, Henry, don't think I don't know how tough this is on you. It's difficult for most people to realize that medical standards don't coincide with

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ordinary, common sense notions in a thing like this, but unless you achieve some degree of detachment, you're sunk."

He let me alone then and went back across the room to call the hospital. Presently he was discussing Myshkin, slinging technical jargon, but there were occasional phrases—I had no doubt they were for my benefit—that were clear enough, references to auditory and visual hallucinations, schizoid personalities, delusions of grandeur and persecution and so on. I decided I'd had enough and was getting out of there.

I turned, took a single step and held my breath.

A moment later Siegman looked at me curiously, and then, when he suddenly realized that I was fighting back laughter, he quickly broke off his conversation, replaced the phones and got up to come to me. And then I really let go.

"HELLO, BORIS!" I roared. *"WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?"*

Siegman whirled, took one look, moaned, and keeled over.

Little Boris Borisovitch Simeonof-Pishtchik emerged from under the table where he'd been patiently standing, regarded Siegman's prostrate form, scratched his head and looked up at me.

"Very disappointing," he nodded. "Absolutely."

IT took fifteen minutes to revive Siegman and make it stick. I'd bring him to but he'd take another look at Boris and go out again, so finally I persuaded Boris to stay out of sight until Siegman was prepared for the next look. The trouble was that Boris was in a rush to leave, but he wanted to hear about Myshkin first — apparently he knew something had happened—and I wanted him to stay at least long enough for Siegman to talk to him.

Because there was something else about Boris—a decided air of optimism and a bubbling restless energy that had him hopping around, shooting questions at me until his high, piping voice thinned out to a ridiculous squeak. It worried me to think about the possible reasons Boris might have for his cheerfulness.

So, after awhile, Siegman was able to sit up in the big chair and listen to Boris and me talking. I shouldn't have felt sorry for him but I knew how frightful an experience it was to come to accept the fact of Boris—to look at that little manikin in blue jeans and sweatshirt and canvas shoes; to watch the swift succeeding emotions play on his face when he thanked me for saving his life, or referred to Myshkin with terrible vindictiveness, or smiled mysteriously when he hinted at new developments, shaking his tiny feathery mop of hair or wrinkling his long nose in thought—and to realize that this was a sentient being, possessed of an intelligence with which I was very carefully reckoning.

"What I want to know," Boris was saying, "is why they took him away. And on whose complaint? Yours?"

"No," I said. "What complaint could I make?"

"*What* complaint?" He threw up his hands. "Is murder a crime in this society or a philosophical abstraction? The streets around here are full of police this morning—for what? For the murder of two men! But Myshkin has slaughtered who knows how many of us—three today alone!—and you ask what complaint?" He shook his head bitterly as he murmured, "Forgive me, my friend. I should not expect justice to drop into my hand like a ripe grain of corn."

"But they don't even know about you," I said. "They should— and I want to tell them about you—but not unless

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you and your countrymen come with me and let yourselves be seen. Otherwise there isn't a chance in a million they'd believe me."

Boris looked wise and sad and amused.

"I don't trust you," he said simply. "I say this at the risk of injuring our increasingly pleasant relationship. You saved my life, but when it comes to delivering my few remaining compatriots to your hands, no. It not only violates the counsel of my instincts, but of reason. What can we gain by letting ourselves be known? Look at your friend here. I came upstairs as he was working the telephone, and I listened attentively because he was talking about Myshkin. To be perfectly honest, I didn't understand too much of what he said, but when he mentioned that fiendish Myshkin's delusions of grandeur, I was instantly impressed with the high quality of his intellect and perception. A person of stature and fine sensibilities, I told myself. But what happened when he saw me? He fainted! So why should—"

"But you forget what a shock it is to—"

"Bah! The trouble isn't what I forget, which is very little, but what I expect, which always seems to be too much. Forgive me for my impatience, but I expect an extremely busy day, on my word, so if you will be good enough to tell me when you expect Myshkin back, I'll be on my way."

"I haven't the least idea when he'll be back. It may be days, weeks or months."

"Impossible! Whatever trivial offense Myshkin committed—"

"But you see," I said, "it was Myshkin who was committed."

"What?" Boris started. "Myshkin was —you don't mean—"

"I mean he's in the psychopathic ward at Bellevue," I said. I had considered the risks involved in telling him, but there didn't seem much to lose. "If you do what I ask," I went on, "we may get him discharged in a hurry. If not, there's a serious question about when he might get out—and as long as he's there you haven't a chance of finding out what you're after—where you came from, how he brought you here, how to return. So you see—"

"No, my friend." A thoughtful smile spread over his tiny features. "If that monster's in a psychopathic ward, he'll never get out because he belongs there. But," he nodded, "that doesn't mean I don't want him out."

"Then you'll do it? Just in case it does work?"

Boris laughed. "Hardly. For such a madman the case is hopeless—legalistically. But there are other possibilities. It so happens that matters have suddenly taken a most fortuitous turn for my friends and me, and I think I can promise to do *almost* all that you ask."

"Obviously you have a plan."

"But the plan itself is less obvious, no?"

"You call yourself my friend?" I protested, trying to decide whether or not to make a grab for him. There was no telling how dangerous it might be. "How can you stand here and do the dance of the seven veils with these juicy hints about what's coming? Is that gratitude?"

"Let's not befuddle the issue, shall we?" He drew himself up. "What I owe you—I don't deny it—I owe you alone. But what I owe that incarnate ghoul Myshkin, I intend to pay off swiftly. And now, if I have your permission to return here this afternoon, I must leave."

"Just a moment!" Siegman called.

"Yes?"

"Do the rest of you chicken boys look like Myshkin too?"

"Chick-en boys!" Boris shrieked,

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crimsoning with rage. "How dare you, you popinjay! Save your febrific eructations for the rodomontade canaille at the pothouse, or I'll administer a bastinado that'll put more stripes on you than a zebrula!"

Siegman and I looked at each other with awe, and he said to Boris, "But Boris, all I did was ask a question."

"To me," Boris snapped, "it was a borborygmus! Good day! Bah!" And he turned on his heel

"Boris, did you say you'd be back this afternoon?" I called.

He was at the door when he turned back again. "Yes, I did."

"Do you mind if I ask why?"

"Not at all. To dismantle that infernal machine downstairs."

"Nothing doing," I said.

"So?" said Boris softly, nodding his head the least bit, as if in confirmation of some private expectation. "But we need some of its parts," he said, with the manner of one offering an explanation certain to be rejected. His little body had visibly stiffened.

"For what?" I said. "Not that it matters."

"My friend, I am unable to divulge that information."

"Then keep away from that machine! Understand?"

His face flushed violently. "Only too well . . ."

A moment later he vanished down the stairs. There was a swift very faint patter of rubber-soled shoes, then silence. I went down immediately. The door was unlocked but closed. The doorknob was too high for Boris, even if he could have moved the door. And he wouldn't have ventured into the street in daylight, not this day anyway.

The door to the downstairs room was ajar. I went in, but in that wild disorder it was impossible to tell if anything had been disturbed. I knew the police had been there: they'd left dozens of shoe tracks in the yellow powder on the floor, and there was no hope of finding Boris's among them. The machine's green mantle still covered it but nothing underneath warranted attention. I went to the forge. Myshkin had used it, so the chimney was probably clear. There was no trace of Boris having been there, but I knew we'd have to guard the machine now until we could block off either the chimney or forge.

Siegman was sitting on the bed, smoking. I told him what I'd decided about the forge. I figured the best thing was to stay matter-of-fact and hope Siegman wouldn't blow his top, so I talked, but I couldn't tell if he was listening. Then suddenly he looked up.

"I can't get over his vocabulary," he said. "Not its violence or archaic flavor, though I was damn near floored by both, but his use of more or less medical terms like febrific and borborygmus—and with such familiarity. Where did he learn them?"

"I told you he said he goes to the library. Maybe it's a medical library. I should have grabbed him and stuck him in a coop until Myshkin comes back. Now we've got a war on—"

"You're not going to fight him? You're crazy!"

"Huh!" I said. "You don't think I'm going to let him have his way, do you?"

"Think!" said Siegman. "Myshkin's been terrified ever since he realized what the chicken-men were up to, but he wasn't ready to quit until last night Then he made a last futile effort to wipe them out. Why? Because they've won. It was in every confident word of Boris', in his beady eyes when he listened to you, and I knew it was too late to avoid the whirlpool—"

"Who ever heard of chickens in a whirlpool? You're confusing them with ducks. You'll end up a quack if you're

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not careful."

"But there's an answer—"

"Sure—let's stop them. From what Myshkin said, and Boris, too, I think they still need parts from the machine downstairs. My guess is that Boris is only up to the final step, whatever it is."

Siegman said slowly: "And my guess is that *whatever it is, the* final step is up to Boris only."

"Dazzling," I said. "I congratulate you."

"Is that all you intend to do about it?"

"Do you want it chiseled on the Washington Monument?"

"I would prefer it on your monument," said Siegman, "and maybe you'll get one real soon. I've thought of something that might work out this whole mess, or at least postpone things until we get Myshkin back and let him decide. Instead of being hostile to Boris, my plan is to try hypnotism."

"Why hypnotism? Who gets hypnotized? And by whom? And for what?"

"Boris gets hypnotized. By me. End of rebellion."

"Huh?" I said.

"He considers Myshkin his enemy? I make Myshkin his greatest friend. He thinks the machine's an incubator turned execution-happy? I convince him it's a health ray generator. He's got the rest of the chicken-men hidden? I fix it so's he marches them in here, single file. Anything else?"

"Sure. Get them elected to the House of Representatives."

"You don't believe it can be done? Is that it?"

"It isn't that I'm skeptical about hypnotism or its general efficacy," I said. "Or even that I have doubts about your ability with it; though it wouldn't be unreasonable if I did."

"Then what is it?"

"Al, we're talking about *chicken-men!*"

"Well?" he asked, frowning.

"It's utterly . . . . " But I didn't finish. "At that," I shrugged, "your idea's no more absurd than just talking about chicken-men . . ."

So we talked about Siegman's plan with increasing seriousness, realizing that without the vital condition of Boris' return, any plan would be useless.

That involved my guess about the importance of the machine to Boris. Certainly, after his furious exit, we could hardly expect any social calls from him. If he returned, it would be only because he wanted to get at the machine. And that meant we were to do nothing to make his ingress more difficult. The chimney and forge would be left untouched. Then a close watch would be kept, so that if Boris did come we'd know it. After that, avoiding the merest breath of enmity, we might be able to woo him into position for Siegman's crack at him.

That decided, we felt better and I took Siegman down, finally, to see the machine. It meant as little to him as it had to me. He gave it a quick once-over, shrugged, and went back upstairs with me, talking about things he'd observed about Boris. Most of it was too technical for me, like his remarks about Boris' eyes—about the lens being held in place by the ciliary process which attached to the eyeball at the ora serrata, while the iris attached to the choroid, and the large posterior eyeball and distinctively developed pecten—and so on.

But I did catch what he said about Boris having a cockscomb. He called it a fleshy caruncle and a gallinaceous crest, but when he asked if I'd noticed it too, he had to translate, and it turned out he was talking about a cockscomb!

"You're kidding!" I said.

"The hell I am," said Siegman. "I saw it every time he turned his head quickly. It's usually hidden by his fili-

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plumes—what you call his hair—though they do seem to be an amazing cross between hair and feathers. Of course," he rambled on, "some are more like plumulae or pennae than filiplumes, but where the apteria is so obviously much greater than the pterylae—"

The phone rang while we were laughing. Siegman dived for it, picked it up, spoke a few words, then turned to me. "It's for you," he said. "It's Harriet Hopper."

I grabbed the phone and talked to her, or tried to. The news about the waterfront robbery had been broadcast, and she'd heard it and realized it had happened on the street next to Myshkin's house. That was why she'd called. Were we all right? What was Al Siegman doing at Myshkin's, when he'd gotten home at maybe six in the morning? How did she know? Because Gladys was with her and she said so. I said, well, if Gladys could be with her, Al could be with me. But Gladys had a reason for being there, she said. There was a reason for Al being here, I said. No, I couldn't tell her. Couldn't swap reasons either. Nothing was wrong. I wasn't aware I sounded odd. All right, I'd put Al on and let him talk to Gladys.

Al took the phone, said hello honey, listened for half a minute without saying another word, and hung up.

"What's wrong?" I said. "Why'd you hang up?"

"Gladys hung up," he said, blinking. "They're coming here."

"Who's coming here? Why didn't—"

"Gladys said don't waste time arguing; she has to see me and Harriet wants to see you; they'll be right down."

"They'll go right back."

"But why shouldn't they come? Now wait. I want to go to the hospital and see about Myshkin, and if I leave you alone you'll be dead asleep before I'm out the door, and who'll be watching the place in case Boris shows up?"

"And what if Boris shows up while they're here?"

"Not a chance. The voices would frighten him. Besides, he's a fanatic and fanatics hate women. I don't see where company would hurt—"

"You lecher. I know just—"

"Don't tell me you're too tired to see Harriet?" he grinned.

So I went out and walked to the corner, where I found a police sergeant. I told him what Nulty had said about visitors and that we expected two ladies, and would he see that they were allowed to come in? The sergeant winked and said it was a fine day for it and he would certainly see to it. I thanked him and asked how the search was getting on, and he said nothing had turned up so far except, apparently, for us, and he winked again.

I was feeling pretty good by the time I got back to the house. It almost seemed like an ordinary Sunday.

THE girls hadn't been at the house very long before Siegman and I realized we'd overlooked something that was wrecking our hopes for a rosy interlude—the explanations we were obviously expected to make.

A little lie destroyed us. It wasn't even a lie, it was just an omission—we didn't mention Boris. But omit Boris, you might say, and obit us. The lie multiplied like an amoeba. Pretty soon Siegman and I were contradicting each other about every third word. When our conversation began to consist almost exclusively of *buts*, Harriet gave me a look that made my teeth ache and said no more.

But not Gladys. Evidently she and Al had become romantically entangled the night before. Now she suspected another girl might be mixed up somewhere in Al's horribly inept evasions. She kept

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poking everything he said as if she wanted to see how big a hole she could make in it. It was a fascinating experiment but she finally quit. Reason one was, as she said: "I know you had only two or three hours to double-cross me in, but if you can work that fast, on no sleep, you're for me." Reason two was what had brought her dashing early that morning to Harriet's apartment, and now to Siegman—her own trouble.

In two words, it consisted of Roscoe Cramwell.

In a few more words, some of them not obscene, it became the story of Roscoe Cramwell's searing passion for Gladys. They had been engaged five or six times. They were completely incompatible, she said, because Cramwell was an overwhelming egotist, a creature of moods and cataclysmic rage. He was also given to loathsome suspicions and vile fits of jealousy, which it turned out were now in vigorous exercise because of Al Siegman.

"Who—*me?*" cried Siegman.

"Darling, who else?" said Gladys.

"How does *he* know?"

"Darling, that's just it—he doesn't have to *know* anything! His mind's like an explosion in a cesspool. Just because we sneaked away from the party—and he hasn't the *right!* Who does he think he is to sit on my fire escape? Sweets, you have so *many* muscles, but you mustn't. I wouldn't blame you after what he said about you, but if you do it'll be so *unpleasant* for everybody—"

"Stop, stop!" Siegman cried, holding his head. He looked at her and ran his nervous hands through his hair. What are you trying to say, darling?" he asked gently. "I'm still out on the fire escape. Slowly now."

"But it's so simple really, darling! Roscoe said you're nothing but a contemptible—Oh, no, I shouldn't. It's so *pointless.* Forgive me, darling, it's wretched of me. But you should have heard him, sitting out there on my fire escape this morning and delivering a lecture on my behavior at the top of his voice. There wasn't a closed window in the neighborhood two minutes after he began. And the *threats!* Darling, I can't help thinking you ought to know. He's not that crazy, but if anything happened to you because I'd held back . . ."

Siegman had closed his eyes. She hesitated a moment, smiled shyly and said, "Roscoe said if I don't marry him, he'll kill you."

Siegman opened his eyes.

"It doesn't *seem* logical, darling, but I understand his mind. He expects me to marry him to save you. It may have happened in a play he was in. His threats are just too ridiculous, but he does own a shotgun . . . and I seem to remember him mentioning bloodhounds or something."

She stood there, lips parted, red hair hanging in thick wild waves to her shoulders, wide eyes intent on Siegman, shooting him signals in universal code. The light that came in through the front windows to mold her figure did a great job. She looked the materialization of a mass subconscious idea—like the girl on the barber shop calendar come alive.

Siegman turned to me and held out his hands. "I can't cope with it. Maybe some other time, if my mind was free, but not now. Gladys, baby, I'm sorry."

"But darling what am I to *do?*"

"Marry him," said Siegman.

"Darling . . ." she said, but it hurt.

"What's wrong with him? He's got money and he's considered a very fine actor in some circles. A great actor, madly in love with you. You don't dismiss a wonderful proposal like that because he was a little awkward the way he went about it."

"Don't you want me?" she asked softly.

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"Not with bloodhounds," said Siegman. "I've been slowing up lately."

Gladys backed away from him. When the first tear fell she turned and quickly ran out of the room and down the stairs. I was right after her and Harriet was behind me. I caught Gladys before she could open the outer door and I talked to her. I tried to explain how tired Al was, what a strain the morning had been, how frustrated he felt not being able to tell her about it. Harriet did some talking too, and after while we'd comforted her enough for Harriet to go up and have a talk with Siegman.

You know what was on my mind, don't you? If Gladys left, so would Harriet. Somehow it seemed very important to me that Harriet stay. And when I saw Harriet working toward the same end, whatever her reason was, it made me conscious of my pulse.

Gladys and I could hear the voices upstairs. What they said was too indistinct to catch, but soon Siegman wasn't doing any of the talking. I told Gladys to powder her nose and wait for Al in the downstairs room, and then I went up to arrange it. I found Siegman trying to figure out what he was supposed to be ashamed of, but at least it was a beginning. I agreed with everything Harriet said and when she paused I took over.

I was going pretty good when it happened.

Siegman and I were halfway down the stairs before we even knew why we were running. Boris had put us so on edge that we didn't have to think about him—he was a reflex. The realization that what we'd heard was a rooster crowing didn't catch up with us until we were pushing open the door to the downstairs room.

It happened again just as we burst in.

Right near us, a few feet inside the room, Gladys was standing quite still, staring toward the forge with an enchanted smile. Halfway between her and the forge, at the summit of a mountain of litter, Boris stood transfixed. Fire shot out of his eyes as he returned Gladys' gaze, and his balance seemed precarious enough for a breath to upset him. He seemed completely unaware of Siegman and me as he slowly raised his arms.

They came up as if being levitated, with a rigid, mechanical sweep, and held a moment. Suddenly they dropped and began beating excitedly against his sides—as if he were flapping wings—and his jaw elevated and he crowed again.

God, how he crowed! Such *tremolo!* This was no ordinary rooster crowing—this was the crow of a rooster who had just discovered he *was* a rooster and couldn't get over it! Such *legato!* . . .

When Harriet walked into the room and let out a gasp that was part scream, the magic moment ended. Boris's head snapped around. He saw us, whirled, and took a tremendous flying leap to the floor. He landed lightly, sped across the short distance to the forge and vanished, leaving behind a tiny, rising cloud of yellow powder and several dainty toe-prints.

"Boris!" Siegman shouted. "Boris, come back!"

He charged forward, tripped over a cable and went down with a reverberating crash. By the time I reached him, Gladys was on her knees smothering his head in her arms while he thrashed about to sit up.

"Darling," Gladys cried, "Why didn't you tell me that this great big secret of yours was about Mr. Myshkin's little brother! Darling, he's so *sweet!*"

Siegman's eyes bugged out at her. "Henry, I won't be responsible if you don't take her away!"

I let him yell. I was trying to figure out what I had seen, and what it could possibly have meant—not that I didn't

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have interesting ideas. Gladys kept cooing at Siegman until he ran out of breath and threats. I thought maybe he was going to cry.

"He's gone for good," he moaned. "Our last chance . . ."

"But darling, he'll be back! I know he will!"

"How do you know?" I said.

She turned to me. "He promised."

"When?" I said.

"He didn't say specifically. He was talking about it, and then all at once, in that way he has—it happened once before that; didn't you hear it?—he just stopped talking and began to wave his arms at me and started to sing in that *funny* way—"

"Sing?" I said. "That was crowing!"

"Henry, darling, I really don't see what he had to crow about. I was only there a few minutes before you came in, and all we did was talk a little. If—"

"What did you talk about?" I said. "How did it start?"

"Well, he asked who I was, and I said my name was Gladys—"

"Just like that? You walk in and he says who are you and you say I am Gladys and how would you like to come and see my grandma's big green cat what lives with her? No reaction? No emotions?"

"Darling, you mean how did I *feel?* I was quite frightened. I hadn't seen him yet, and that bell-like voice of his—it's too precious, really, but it was ghastly until I saw him. He'd been hiding in here—" she pointed to the forge "—but he came out to let me see him. Naturally, I understood *everything* then, so—"

"What do you mean *everything?*"

"Darling, about his being Mr. Myshkin's little *Brother!*"

"Gladys, he *isn't* Myshkin's little brother!"

"But he looks just like him! *Isn't* he really? Henry, darling, then who *is* he?"

"Never mind, dear. Just go on with what happened."

She smiled at me and winked. "Well, he'd heard us in the hall and he was going to run away. He had his little kerchief packed, and a roadmap in his hand—so *very* sweet; but so *unhappy*—"

"Gladys," I said gently, "We realize that colorful details make a better story, but he wasn't actually carrying a packed kerchief and a roadmap—now was he, dear?"

"Oh, I know you never *dreamed* he'd run away but what was he to do, with everyone so ashamed of him just because he happens to be smaller than average."

"Gladys." I groaned. "did he tell you that?"

"Darling," she smiled, "I *understood.* One's either sensitive to these things or one isn't. Call it radar or television or something—*I* don't know! Of course, it *did* come up when he said he'd have to leave before any of you came in, and naturally I asked why, and he said if he was caught he'd be made a prisoner again until Mr. Myshkin got back, and then maybe he'd be *done away* with! Well, I said nothing more about it, though how anyone could be so cruel to one's own *brother—"*

"Gladys, I told you he is *not* Myshkin's brother!"

"Darling, *why* mustn't I know?"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't know, Gladys. If there were, I'd say so even if I couldn't tell you what the reason is. Now, there are a great many people around who are *not* related to Myshkin in any way, and it so happens that you met one of them."

"Really, Henry, you're very convincing."

"I'm glad. Now what about his promise to come back?"

"Oh, I asked him to promise he wouldn't go far and that he'd come back soon,

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and he promised."

"Is that all?"

"Darling, isn't that enough?"

"But you were together in here for three or four minutes before we came. Did you spend the time in silent communion?"

"Darling, that's *all* we talked about that concerns you. I regard the rest as something very personal and very dear to me."

"Romance . . ." I said, staring at her. "That's what you're talking about, isn't it?"

"*Yes,* darling. He made love to me."

"He *what?* WHAT? Gladys—"

"But he *did,* darling—oh, I mean verbally! You're a dear, but you're *such* a brute. Really, it was innocent and lovely. He asked me who I was, and after I wasn't frightened any more I told him my name, and he climbed up on those boxes and began to say all sorts of wonderful things—about my hair and my eyes, and how he would leave here to go to a wonderful country where he would be a prince, and I would be a princess if I went with him."

"What did you say?"

"Baby, I didn't get a chance. As soon as he stopped talking, he started singing. As a matter of fact, the first time he began to sing *while* he was talking—as if the song just overpowered him, really. Darling, I *know* you think he was crowing. Well, he'd just promised to come back, and he was singing again when you arrived. That's *all.*"

"I don't believe her," said Siegman, blinking at me.

"Now listen, darling—"

"Gladys, dear, be quiet," I said. "Why don't you believe her?"

"She's either wrong or not telling the truth, or both. What about that cute little packed kerchief and the roadmap? How true was that? How true does it sound? Sure, I see—"

He broke off abruptly to look at the forge. There was a very faint scraping sound that seemed to be coming from high up in the chimney. Then a tapping and a rustling.

Siegman leaned over the hearth to look up the chimney under the hood, and immediately held an arm out to signal he had something. The scraping stopped.

A pinch of soot powdered down from the chimney, and then something dropped out and hit Siegman between the eyes. His head sank halfway into his shoulders before he realized he wasn't hurt. I got a quick look at what had hit him—it was a gayly figured ladies' handkerchief, corners knotted to make a minute bundle—but as Siegman reached for it, more soot rained down, there was a rustle, and a folded square of paper fluttered out of the chimney and landed near the handkerchief.

We waited an instant longer, until the subdued crowing that echoed down the chimney died away, and then Siegman looked under the hood again. "He's gone!" he said, and grabbed for the handkerchief.

I picked up the square of paper, unfolded it, and compared what we had.

"You *see?*" Gladys cried. "It's his wee kerchief and map!"

She was wrong. What Siegman had untied was a wee kerchief, all right, but instead of being packed presumably with Boris's belongings, it contained some twenty jewels—emeralds and blazing rubies and amethysts — unmistakably taken from Myshkin's machine. What I had was not a map, but a small detailed blueprint with captions that indicated it had to do with an enlarger, and on its blank side there was a fresh handwritten note.

I had seen the crude writing on the darkroom walls. The graceful letters of this note were the product of a practised

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penman, but his evidently irrepressible delight in making a pen scratch—here as on the walls—established a generic link.

I read the writing at the top of the sheet out loud:

"Darling, I'll be back as soon as I can. Darling, meanwhile you can lose them characters for me. Darling, the ice is yours. Wait for me, sweets. Boris."

Siegman scowled. "Ice, huh?"

"He means the jewels." I said.

"Oh, what a *darling!*" said Gladys.

"I know he means the jewels," Siegman said irritably. "What I'd like to know is what makes him *use* a word like ice. And where did he learn to call us characters?"

"To call us characters what, darling?" said Gladys.

"Just characters, Gladys," I said. "Characters, period."

"What period, darling?"

"The post-war period, darling."

"Thank you. Henry, darling. I'm glad to see that *someone* around here can explain things."

I read the rest of the note:

"My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear;
The love is merchandiz'd whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere."

"Magnificent!" Gladys breathed.

"Shakespeare," said Siegman. "From one of his sonnets, number one hundred something."

"Darling, you're *jealous!*"

"Of that little chicken-boy?"

"Chicken boy, darling?"

"You didn't think he was *human*, did you? He was *hatched!*"

". . . Hatched . . . darling? *Hatched?*"

"From an egg. By Myshkin. That's what's behind all this."

Harriet, who hadn't uttered a word since she'd come in, was already quickly moving toward Gladys, but Gladys stood there swaying and staring dreamily into Siegman's eyes, and she went on staring and swaying until Harriet keeled over in a dead faint. I was glad to catch her, but it was confusing.

WHEN we told the girls the truth I knew the Myshkin *Affaire* was getting very big, but I wasn't sure that was altogether bad. I'd begun to see where the more people we had in it, the better it might be for Myshkin when the end came.

For Harriet, who'd seemed to follow most of it, the whole thing became unreal. The one time she spoke, she said she understood how such a thing could happen, but not that it had *happened*. The reaction Gladys had was less metaphysical: she decided we were trying to cover up Myshkin's disgraceful behavior toward his small brother. Whatever chance we'd had with her was gone when she recalled that Siegman had shouted, "Boris!"

"Darling, how *many* Russians do you know?" she smiled.

"His name is Boris Borisovitch Simeonof-Pishtchik." I said.

"Darling, you're so much *cleverer* than I am," she said, and let out a merry little laugh. "Of course, I won't say a *word* to the SPCC until I've seen little Boris again."

"What's SPCC?" I asked.

"Society Prevention Cruelty Children," Siegman said hollowly.

"Oh, no," I groaned. "Gladys, darling, please—"

"Henry, baby, I'm *staying*. Really."

I'd let that end it. There wasn't the slightest sense trying to make her understand, and the one thing I'd realized was that Gladys *had* to stay with us. Inexplicable as it was, she was not only

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our link to Boris, but in some utterly strange fashion she fascinated him. I remember the way Boris had looked at her when he crowed. Whatever Gladys had, I was grateful for her decision to keep it on the premises, where it was needed.

Then we'd settled down to wait.

The afternoon had worn on and worn on us. Siegman and I had grabbed a few fitful winks and the girls played gin with an old deck of cards they found. The streets around us had gradually settled to a summery stillness that was unmarred by the sounds of river traffic. In this somewhat other-worldly peace I'd found myself wondering, by six o'clock, which of us would drop from hunger first. Myshkin's cupboard was a Mother Hubbard and neither Siegman nor I had been willing to chance missing Boris by chasing out for a few edibles—and Gladys' going was unwise. Finally Harriet had volunteered to scout for supplies.

She hadn't been gone very long when a cop came upstairs to say that the rules were off. Then Harriet had phoned. She'd remembered, after finding all the local groceries closed, that this was a Sunday, and she'd decided to bring some stuff from her place uptown. She would phone again when she started back so that I could meet her at the police line. I told her the police had gone, and not to use the telephone because it might conceivably ring at an unpropitious moment.

But we could have rented the phone to a cigar store bookie for the next hours, without interfering with anything.

DARKNESS had come so abruptly that I was startled to see the phosphorescent glow of Siegman's watch across the twenty feet that separated us. He was at the window, staring out at the thick, soft dusk. It was just past seven-fifteen.

"I think Harriet's back!" Siegman called. "I saw—"

The telephone went off with an ear-splitting ring that broke off what Siegman was saying. I'd heard the front door opening just as he spoke, then footsteps swiftly bounding up the stairs before I remembered that Harriet had no key for the front door and I yanked the string for the light.

There was a blue-white explosion and there stood Myshkin.

"Turn that damned light off!" he shouted.

I yanked again and the darkness fell on us with tremendous weight. But I could still see Myshkin. His after-image blazed in red outline and I saw his tangled mane of hair, his upthrust arms shielding eyes that looked wilder than ever. He was leaning against the doorjamb, a robe wrapped around him, gasping for breath.

The telephone cut through everything and on the third ring I picked it up.

"Hello," I said. ". . . Yes, hold on. Al, it's for you."

I struck a match. It flared up to reveal Myshkin and Al looking at each other. They moved together, Siegman toward me, Myshkin toward the window. The match went out before they passed, but nothing happened and Siegman took the phone.

"Hello . . . Yes, who? Oh, hello . . . What? . . . When? . . . But . . . Oh . . . Oh, I see . . . Yes . . . Yes, of course, and thanks . . . All right. Goodbye."

I took the phone from him. I could hear Myshkin moving at the window. He was controlling his breathing. There wasn't a sound not made by Myshkin until I rattled the phone as I replaced it.

"Who was it, Al?" I asked.

"My friend at the hospital. The resident."

"Well?"

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Siegman said dryly: "He says Myshkin's missing from the ward."

"Oh . . ."

"He also says they think maybe he's still in the hospital somewhere, but his clothes are gone and they've notified—"

"Shut up!" Myshkin snapped.

"Listen, Myshkin—"

"Including you, Henry! Turn on the light, dammit!"

"You just said to turn it off."

"Turn it *on!* There're liable to be cops here any minute. You want to have to explain why you had the lights off? Make a shade for it. Wrap a towel around it or something. My eyes are burning . . ."

I fumbled around for towels and got on a chair, and knotted two of them on the wire. It made quite an effect when I pulled the light-string again. The towels were stained a hundred different shades from Myshkin's chemicals, and they hung down over the bulb and threw soft blobs of color everywhere.

"Thanks," said Myshkin. He took a few steps closer to us and stopped and looked at Gladys. All he had on was a pair of loose pajamas that had once been blue, a brown wool bathrobe and a pair of cloth bedroom slippers. "Who's this?" he asked.

"Gladys De Winter," I said. "She's a friend of Miss Hopper."

"What is she doing here?"

"She's with Siegman."

"What kind of an answer is that?" Myshkin snapped. Then he looked at Siegman. "You can drop dead. No loss to medicine."

"I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Myshkin," said Gladys.

Myshkin gave her a sneer that showed his teeth, and the light gave them a greenish glow. "You'll have to be tied up and put in a closet," he said. "Look around for some rope. Shut up, Henry. Don't ask me any questions. Right now let's figure out what happens if they send a cop here. I haven't been here. You know I'm on the loose because the resident phoned, but that's all. It's got to be done right so they won't think of searching the place. Nowhere to hide here. Right? Well?"

"You're not tying *me* up and putting *me* in a closet, brother," said Gladys. "I've got two octaves more than I need to be heard in Port Jervis."

"Who *is* she?" said Myshkin. "A man can't leave his house a few hours without coming back to find a convention?"

"She's all right," I said. "Don't worry about it."

"That's what they kept saying at the hospital: don't worry about anything! Hah! You realize what I'm up against? Get Paul Muni on the phone and ask him how he'd like to play a fugitive from an insane asylum! Listen, Henry, you won't get rattled if they come?"

"Don't worry about it," I said.

"I'm dying for a cigarette," said Myshkin. "Henry, maybe I shouldn't be here. Maybe that's just what Boris wants. Where could I go in these pajamas except home? That's why he didn't bring me my clothes in time. He engineered the whole thing to get me back here, but why? What's the answer?"

"Did you say *Boris* got you out?"

"Didn't I?" He grabbed the cigarette I'd come over to give him. There was a red spot on his forehead and two blue-green lights on his sunken cheeks, and with the smoke pouring out of his mouth and nostrils he looked like someone who'd just signed a document for a party with horns. "It was Boris, all right," he said. "There's no evidence, but it's the only answer."

"What answer?"

"Listen, Henry, they got notes to me without being seen! They sent me a pair of special glasses! They opened

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doors, opened the wardrobe lock, took down clothes—all this with guards and doctors and nurses and patients and visitors around them and nobody saw them! I saw my pants being slid out of the wardrobe closet! I saw it and there was no one there!"

"No!" I said.

"It means they—"

"Who's *they?*"

"Boris! There must have been others too. There was too much going on at once for even three of them. Doors opening, chalked arrows in the halls, lights going out, fire exits swinging open—that's how it was. First a note saying they were going to get me out. Then a note with some instructions, where my clothes would be waiting and so forth, then one setting the time. It went off wonderfully, except my clothes weren't in the office where I was supposed to find them, but everything else worked."

"So what do you think?" I said.

"What can I think? I think they've found out how to become invisible!"

"You have any of these notes you received?" I asked.

"No, I tore them up. It didn't—"

"What was the handwriting like?"

"Beautiful—nothing like Boris' lousy scratches. But the references, the language, the directions were typically Boris'. Invisibly delivered!"

"You know something, Myshkin," I said. "I believe you."

"You do?"

"Part of it, anyway. In spite of you. You'd rather not have told it and you don't want me to believe it, but you couldn't think of anything else—"

"Henry, on my word—"

"What am I supposed to do now? Think you really did go nuts? You think you'll stop me? Myshkin, after Boris sinks into one's brain, it's soft enough to take anything. I'm taking this because I *know* you got a note from Boris, whether or not it was invisibly delivered. See?"

"You *know* I got a note?"

"At least one."

"May I ask *how* you know?"

"Myshkin, we got a note with that same beautiful penmanship—and ours was also dropped invisibly—but we *know* that note came from Boris. It's signed. And we have ours."

"Give it to me!"

I looked at him distastefully. "It's invisible."

"Henry, I swear to you it's all true! Every syllable of every word! Where's the note?"

"How can you lie like that?"

Myshkin started to answer before he realized that I hadn't said it, and before the impact of that high, thin fantastic voice of Boris' got to him. He ducked his head as if he'd gotten a whack across the back of his neck, and then he spun around fast and saw what Gladys and Siegman and I had seen two seconds sooner.

Boris was leaning against the door, legs crossed, chewing a match. Hands thrust deep in the pockets of his jeans, wearing a small checkered cap with its long visor pulled down over his eyes, he offered a study of a relaxed *apache*-type. He stood bathed in bright orange, a shadowed indigo leer on his face, apparently unconcerned with Myshkin's proximity. If he was aware of the sudden tension that had entered the room with him, he gave no sign of it.

"Understand me," he went on, "I ask only with reverence. On my word, Myshkin, when I listen to one of your lies I feel as if I were in church. Your most casual fibs—even your fibicles—reveal the basic duality of genius: a flourishing art and the serenity that resides in faith. You leave the truth a drab, a drear, a drained thing. Let us

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hear more on this matter of invisibility. It—"

I grabbed Myshkin's arm hard enough to let him know he wasn't going to dive at Boris. I didn't want to do anything that overt, but Myshkin didn't know about our plan to hypnotize Boris and there was no way to tell him. Gladys had quickly and very smoothly slid out of Boris's sight behind a section of the work-tables, and Siegman was carefully coming forward. I tried to signal Myshkin by tightening and relaxing my grip on his arm.

Myshkin looked at me, a slight frown passed over his face, and he stopped trying to fight.

"Boris!" Siegman called vibrantly. "Boris . . . lisssennn . . ."

Boris raised his chin enough so that he no longer had to look up from under his hat. I was startled when I saw his eyes. They were like black molten glass.

"Borr-riss," said Siegman, gently, sonorously. "Yourrr eyezzz hurrrtt, donnn' theyyy? Yezzz, they dooo. They hurrt verr-rree mudge, sooo-oo verr-rrree mudge. Worrking too harrrd, worr-reeing too mudge. Ohhh for a rezzztt . . ."

Boris' unblinking gaze was fixed on Siegman. It was remarkable to see the contrast between his limber, disjointed posture and the rigidity with which he kept his head erect. He began to nod a little as language oozed at him. Presently he was maintaining the rhythm of Siegman's syrupy enunciation so perfectly that it became impossible to tell who was leading whom . . . unless Boris was anticipating a good deal of what Siegman said . . . or as if what was being said no longer mattered and only the rhythm was left . . .

"Clooozze yourrr eyezzz," Siegman droned on: "Ohhh forrr a nizzze lonnngg rezzztt . . . clooozzze . . . cloozzzze . . . weee-rrreee eyezzzz . . . yezzzz . . .

"Catch him before he falls over," said Boris.

Well, I might have caught him if Myshkin hadn't leaped for Boris. As it was I swung for Myshkin first, missed, and then it was too late. Siegman dropped and hit the floor with a thud. I whirled for Myshkin again, certain I'd find Boris lifeless in his hands—

I was mistaken. Boris not only hadn't stirred, but he seemed completely unaware of what might have happened to him. The question remained an academic one, however, because Myshkin was confronted by a deadly black automatic. It took a few seconds for the muzzle to shrink enough to let me see who was holding the gun.

He was one of those long lean characters who wear form-fitting Chesterfields with padded shoulders. He had a face a dope peddler would have been proud to own; sallow, pinched, incisive—when the light hit his jutting cheekbones they glinted like unsheathed blades. He had on a pearl gray fedora, black patent-leather shoes as slim as destroyers, and gray suede gloves. The gloves blurred occasionally because his hands had a tendency to shake, but everything else about him seemed immovable; he might have been a life-size cut-out in a movie lobby. His eyeballs were yellow, with irises as huge and black and lustreless as licorice gumdrops. When I looked into them it was like looking through holes in a fence.

He stood in the doorway where he had first appeared, towering over Boris. He held the gun in his right hand, the elbow bent and kept close to him, and his left hand hung at his side. If there was any expression on his face, I missed it.

". . . See how it is?" Boris said quietly. "I promised a pay-off, didn't I? That's how it is."

"Boris, you—"

"You take care of Svengali there,"

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Boris cut me off gently. "I have some business to transact with Mr. Myshkin —several rather urgent questions remain to be . . . ah . . . settled. Mr. Myshkin, would you mind . . . ah . . . climbing into a more decorous costume? It may be necessary for us to leave these premises."

"Aaahhhhh. . . ." Myshkin let his breath out.

"Yerrs?" said Boris. He meant "yes" but he purred it.

"My clothes," said Myshkin distantly.

Sure enough, his clothes were lying in a bundle on the floor behind Boris—the torn, blood-stained, yellow-spotted pants and old shoes rolled up in his hooded green sweater.

". . . You didn't forget . . . my clothes . . ." Myshkin murmured.

"That's not all I didn't forget," said Boris. "Let's go downstairs to the execution chamber. I've got a few questions I'd like to have answered."

Myshkin nodded and took a long slow breath, like a man who had made a final decision and arrived at a final calm. The look in his eyes matched perfectly with the crazy, dreamy look the gunman wore, only Myshkin's knees were shaking worse than the gunman's hands.

"I stay here," he said dreamily. "I refuse to go."

"Myshkin," Boris said gently, "don't make my boy invite you. He's a nervous boy."

"You know what you look like?" said Myshkin. "Ask me. Like a sewer rat, on my word. Whoever dreamed up this scene should be put on Serutan for a month. And this guy with you—"

"Myshkin! Shut up!" I shouted.

"Go on!" said Boris. "Keep talking!"

Myshkin swallowed hard. "Why not? This guy with you—"

That was as far as he got. The gunman took two steps to Myshkin—he seemed to glide rather than step—and his right hand came up to put the gun a foot from Myshkin's wildly bobbing Adam's apple. The muzzle looked like a tunnel entrance. I saw the gray-gloved fingers tremble violently as they tightened on the gun, then my eyes squeezed shut.

But the only sound I heard was the doorpull downstairs. Then silence. When my eyes opened I was observing the fantastic effect the bell seemed to have had on Boris and the gunman.

Boris' face was screwed up in ghastly pain. He had taken his hands out of his pockets and he was holding his fists up in front of his face. A tiny silver object gleamed in his right hand and his whole arm quivered as though the pain was flowing from this object down his arm into his stiff little body. The gunman was rocking on his heels. His gun hand had gone down to his side as if something had pulled it down, but it had fought its way up again and now it was slowly, inexorably, forcibly being pulled down again. Maybe five or six seconds had passed . . .

Then the bell went off again.

Boris cried out: "Next time, Myshkin! *Next* time!"

He and the gunman moved together. Boris spun around and ran out across the threshold. The gunman slid past Myshkin and me, raised his gun and smashed the covered electric bulb. There was a pop and a tinkle of broken glass.

In the darkness tiny footsteps leaped down the stairs. Almost simultaneously the downstairs door opened, there was a smothered cry from somewhere far off, and Myshkin sagged against me. I was moving at the time, and I shunted Myshkin off before I could help it. He fell away and from the demented roar that followed I concluded he had landed on Siegman. That was the first time in many minutes I'd remembered Siegman, and when Gladys' howling was added

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to the uproar I remembered her too.

But kept running down the stairs.

IT was Harriet. She was holding a big paper bag in her arms and there was another at her feet. There was a street light near the piers that didn't give much light, but it would have shown anyone on either side of the street, and there was no one except Harriet.

"Where'd they go?" I shouted. "You must've—"

Then I noticed the way she looked—not just that she was dazed and frightened, but the yellow powder that was all over her short blue coat. I touched it and felt her whole body trembling.

"What happened?" I said. I sniffed the air. There was an odor like ozone, the kind of smell you get around trolley barns, and something less familiar I couldn't quite place, and the dissipating remains of what seemed to have been a dust cloud still hung in the air. "Harriet, what's the matter?" I begged. "Say something! Can't you talk?"

"Yes." she nodded slowly. "Take this bag, stupid."

"I'm sorry," I said. "It's—"

"*Henry!*—What's that?"

"That's Siegman yelling because Myshkin fell on him."

"*Myshkin?*"

"Shhh! He escaped. That's who Boris and that gunman with him were after—"

"Boris? . . . and th-that . . . gunman? . . ."

"That was who you saw running out about a minute after— Huh?. What's the head-shaking for? You saw them, didn't you? You *must* have seen them!"

". . . I . . . no . . ."

"But you were down here—"

I ran into the house and down the hall into the downstairs room. I knew it was empty even before I'd turned on the light. Upstairs I could hear Siegman alternately shouting and groaning, and Myshkin talking in a subdued voice, and I had a cold shiver and went outside to Harriet.

She was sitting on the brick step, staring at the empty street with intense concentration. I took the bags and helped her into the house. A light had gone on upstairs and as we started up, Myshkin appeared at the top.

"Did you lock it?" he cried. He had apparently recovered from whatever had afflicted him and he looked wilder—if possible—than ever. "Who's *this* dame?" he shouted. "Oh, Miss Hopper! Don't tell me *she*— But what happened to Boris and— *My God, what's this?*"

"Yellow powder," I said.

Myshkin's eyes bulged. He reached for Harriet and I gave him a hack across the arm. The next moment Gladys ran up with a flurry of excited little cries that added up to the distressing fact that the coat was hers. Siegman was standing at the sink, gulping water and moaning softly as he watched us. I took the glass from him to bring Harriet some water and he followed me with hoarse complaints that it was the only glass. Myshkin was trying to get at Harriet as Gladys settled her in the armchair, and when I came over he began mumbling to himself. Gladys was rubbing a handkerchief on the coat without affecting the powder, telling Harriet not to mind while she herself wept bitterly. Harriet sipped the water, and gave the glass back to me.

"Do you feel better now?" I asked her.

"I feel fine," she said.

"Because if you'd rather wait a bit—"

"Who asked you?" Myshkin shouted. "If you want to wait, wait! She says she feels fine!"

"Look at her!" I said. "Look at her eyes!"

"There's nothing wrong with my eyes," said Harriet. "Some of the pow-

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der got into them, that's all. And the odor got me a little dizzy, I suppose."

"Please, Miss Hopper," Myshkin cried, clasping his hands in entreaty, "please, please, please, *please* tell me what happened when they ran out. Did Boris—"

"But I didn't see anyone run out."

"What do you mean you didn't see anyone?" I said.

"But she was—"

"I know she was! Shut up! Let her talk!"

"Henry, you're absolutely right! Miss Hopper, I apologize. You were standing downstairs, outside. You yanked that goddam bell two or three times. The downstairs door opened. Right so far? Then—*what happened?*"

"There was an explosion," said Harriet.

". . . Explosion! Myshkin repeated softly. He'd been half leaning over the chair in anxiety, but that word straightened him out. "I don't recall any explosion," he said, furrowing his brow. "I heard a cry and then . . ."

"And then you passed out," I said. "How do you expect to hear explosions when you're out cold?"

"It could have brought me to, couldn't it? I heard this idiot Siegman yell when I fell on him, didn't I?"

"You haven't heard the last of that, either," said Siegman.

"Quiet!" said Myshkin. "Miss Hopper, I'm sorry. Let's see. There was a cry, then the explosion. Now that cry came from you, did it?"

"Probably, but the explosion came first. That's why I cried out. But it didn't make an explosive noise, I mean. Just whfffft!"

"Whfffft?" said Myshkin blankly. "What is that?"

"The sound it made. The door opened and there was a blinding golden flash of light very close to me. When I could see again, the air was filled with yellow powder. It was as if opening the door had set it off."

"Aaahhhhh," Myshkin breathed. "A gold flash. That was all? You didn't see anyone? You know about Boris? No Boris? You didn't see a vicious-looking individual with him?"

"Or without him," said Harriet.

"Just a gold flash. I see . . ."

"Now listen to me, Myshkin," I said. "I can hear what's spinning in your head. You take that gold flash and stuff it. I'm not interested in any theories about invisibility. All I—"

"Impossible? You think it's impossible?"

"Myshkin, what the hell is the matter with you? Aren't there sensible explanations for simple things anymore? Boris flung a bag of yellow powder at her. She wasn't looking down far enough to see him when the door opened, and the powder blinded her so that she couldn't see this other guy. And why are you worrying about such nonsense when you can't begin to explain how Boris ever got together with a human being—"

"You call that a human being?"

"I call it a concrete fact. Where did Boris get that gunman? Why was he obviously working for Boris? How did that happen? What does it mean?"

"May I interrupt?" said Harriet. "No one flung a bag of yellow powder at me."

"All right, no one did," I said. "Myshkin—"

"I might possibly have missed a little thing like Boris," said Harriet, "but no one else ran past me. I was directly in front of the door. They'd have had to push me aside. And it was an explosion—a bright golden noiseless explosion like a flash-bulb."

"All right, it was a golden flash-bulb," I said. "Myshkin—" That time I interrupted myself. "*Wait* a minute!" I

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said. "Myshkin, did you see a tiny silver something in Boris's hand? He took it out of his pocket just before he ran!"

" Hmmmmm?" said Myshkin distantly "Yeah . . yeah . . ."

"Why couldn't that be some kind of a flash-bulb?"

"Yeah?" said Myshkin.

"Yeah! I've heard about something of the sort—an electronic tube or something. He had it ready just for that kind of a getaway if he needed it!"

Myshkin nodded absently. "Maybe he invented it," he said.

"And you own all rights to it, naturally?" said Siegman.

". . . Myshkin, what's wrong?" I said.

"Well, how did the big guy get past Miss Hopper?"

"He just got past her! Maybe she wasn't standing as squarely in front of the door as she thought. Maybe he did push her and she didn't know it. She was in a daze when I got to her—you saw how she was when she first came up here?"

"No one got past me," said Harriet. "Mr. Myshkin, I'm sure!"

"It doesn't matter," Myshkin sighed. He was running thoughtful fingers over the yellow powder that clung to the outside of both paper bags. "It probably doesn't matter . . "

"You're lying," I said. "You think it does matter."

"What you think I think doesn't matter either."

"You're not telling all you—"

"Hey, there's food in here!" Myshkin cried as he ripped open first one bag then the other. "Food! That's what matters!" He began to stack the food on the table, and in a moment he was surrounded by half a smoked turkey, some cold roast chicken, bread and rolls, a chunk of Swiss cheese, olives, tomatoes, butter, coffee, canned peaches and two quart containers of milk. He fell on the stuff without an off-rhythm bite. "Eat! Eat!" he gulped. "S'matter? N'hungry?"

I said, very slowly: "Listen, Myshkin—"

He held up a hand, swallowed hard, and a real smile blossomed. "The discussion continues as soon as you've shown me that note you got from Boris." He started cutting the cheese. "But let's eat too, huh?" he said, and the innocence he tried to get into his eyes was so phony that it was hard to imagine anything more wicked and cunning.

I gave him Boris' note, the handkerchief and the jewels in it. He unfolded the blue-print and stopped chewing. But when he untied the handkerchief and saw what was in it, I had the satisfaction of watching him almost choke to death.

IT was after we'd told Myshkin about Boris' activities that afternoon that I decided his private ideas on what was going on probably weren't worth much. There were too many surprises for him, and too complete a dejection. One thing about Myshkin—he was so much of a natural enthusiast that he couldn't fake misery for more than a brief spell.

The blue-print and the jewels hit him hard, but with the business of Boris crowing at Gladys, shock seemed to set in. He hardly seemed to be listening to me, but he made me tell it twice. Then, after long moments of apparently, bewildered reflection he asked a lot of questions that got him nowhere except into a brief argument with Gladys. She insisted Boris had been singing to her. Myshkin sipped the coffee I'd brewed and listened, but when she stopped talking he returned to silent contemplation of the blue-print.

I went to the table and made myself a sandwich. Siegman was sitting there thoughtfully chewing on the last of the peaches. Gladys and Harriet were shar-

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ing the armchair, having cheese and coffee. Siegman saw me looking at his watch and held his arm up for me. I was astonished to see it said 8:05. Less than an hour had gone by since I had last looked at that watch . . .

"Goodbye, Henry," said Siegman. "I'm leaving. Shall I write?"

"Write yourself a prescription for poison," I said.

"Wait for us," said Harriet.

"How jolly," I said. "You can split the cab three ways."

"I can also split your head three ways," said Harriet.

"I'm just trying to be frank about—"

"You're more Gaul than Frank," she said. I know how she meant those words to be spelled. "I don't pretend to understand anything of this horrible, horrible mess we've become involved in, except its danger. Right now the only thing I like about that danger is the thought that I'll be leaving you in it."

"I'm glad I found you out before I married you," I said.

"On my list you were classified under leprosy," she said.

"Sit down, Miss Hopper, please," said Myshkin quietly.

"I walk much better standing. I'm sorry to—"

"Would you like me to get that powder off your coat?"

"Oh, Mr. Myshkin, *will* you?"

"On my word," said Myshkin, getting up. "It won't take long."

Siegman and I accidentally exchanged glances and I shrugged. We watched Myshkin go to the work tables and start fussing with chemicals. Gladys helped Harriet off with the coat and they went to Myshkin. He gave them a faint smile and murmured something about the test-tubes near him. The girls quickly took the tubes to the sink and washed them. When they returned they stood on either side of Myshkin, like nurses servicing a surgeon, handing him whatever he indicated with sharp movements of his head. Presently the clear liquid in the largest tube turned smoky, then as it bubbled it began to change to a brilliant green.

I went over behind Myshkin and watched.

"Henry, I want you to know I appreciate what it means for you to stay," he said without turning toward me.

"I'm not staying," I said. "I'm only waiting long enough to get you dressed and then we're going downtown to police headquarters. It's just that I wouldn't leave you alone now."

"Afraid for me?" His tone was more polite than derisive.

"Yes."

Myshkin sighed. "You're sweet. Isn't he sweet, Miss Hopper?"

"Yes, he is," said Harriet quietly. "I misunderstood him."

"If you misunderstand me, why don't you marry me?" I said.

"It's cooling off," said Myshkin. "I mean this," he added and held up the tube. The liquid was altogether green by then and the bubbling had stopped. "It'll be ready in a few minutes."

"Meanwhile you can get dressed," I said.

"No, it's got to be watched," Myshkin said. He studied the tube. and set it down in a rack. Then he flapped his robe as if to give himself air. "If I'd had some of this handy when Boris was here, it might have been a different story."

"Yeah?" I said. "How so?"

"The color, for one thing. You've noticed about green?"

"Like the cover on the machine and the cable wrappings?"

"Or these crates up here. I used to find eggs in them all the time until I painted them green."

"Well, what about it? What's the sig-

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nificance?"

"Who knows? Maybe nothing."

"Listen, Myshkin—"

"Please, Henry! It's not as if it was *my* formula."

"It's not your formula?"

"No. Now, do you want to hear me out or not? All right, then. I found it written on Miss Hopper's walls one day. In the darkroom, of course. Well, I compounded it, studied it, heated it, froze it, shook it—nothing. Finally I tried drinking it. One sip and I thought I was finished. Just like that diabolical Boris, I thought—a last flash, you know?—because he knew I'd be scientist enough to try it on myself. I was wrong, but in my panic I'd accidentally smashed the tube and some of the stuff got on me. After I noticed I wasn't dead I also noticed the yellow powder on my pants had disappeared wherever the stuff touched it. The hell of it was that everything I'd tried until then had failed. Well, the first cover I had for the machine was white cotton duck, and it was pretty heavily splattered with the powder, so I used the stuff on it. It was excellent but it gradually turned the cover green. Then I observed that the greener it became the less trouble I had with those insane chicken-men. So I went out and got the highest shade of green I could find for a new cover. Magic. Absolutely kept them off. I soaked the silk in the solution to keep it clean, and I started putting green around on things like the cables and so on. Even that sweater I bought, the one on the floor there, is green. But that's all I know. If they have a reason for reacting like that to green, I don't know what it is. It's just something I've learned that's useful."

The way we had listened to Myshkin you'd have thought he was telling us where he'd buried a treasure.

I said, "The darkroom walls were green too."

"Exactly! I'm glad you asked that question!"

"I haven't asked it yet."

"The logic of it, my dear Henry! Excellent, really! But it was a process that—" He broke off to glance at Siegman, who had drifted to the work table and was idly looking it over, then turning back to me, he repeated: "A process. The walls were originally green, you remember. It meant nothing to me at first; I just wanted the two walls left unpainted until I'd copied my notes off. Meanwhile I discovered new notes were being added, and I certainly didn't want to do anything that might put an end to it. Well, the rebellion broke out openly not long after that, and except for Boris—who wasn't much help, for reasons I didn't appreciate at the time—those walls were my only way of keeping up with them. But then, as I checked their work I'd find all sorts of odd little errors in their calculations, mistakes that were too elementary and too obvious, say, to have been meant to mislead me even if they were aware that I was right behind them—"

"As they were," I said.

"Of course. Boris told them that—"

"And they *didn't* try to mislead you?"

"Yes, they did, but in a larger way. They'd put down things that I've since found out had nothing to do with what they were after, but their errors were something else. For instance, a column of figures that definitely meant something would be added wrong."

"But if they knew you were finding their notes, they certainly realized you were also finding meaningful things in them. Why should they bother to mislead you, when all they had to do was stop writing on the walls?"

"Ah, but you see, *my* notes were on the walls."

"So what? They could have copied

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your notes and—"

"Exactly — except that as it turned out, they couldn't copy anything from those walls with any guarantee of accuracy! When they entered that darkroom and went at my notes, something happened to them. The same affect that was responsible for their meaningless mistakes in calculation, in memory, in judgment, produced similar mistakes in their copying! It took several experiences to convince them of this strange phenomenon — naturally, when they later tried working with their copied material, it became obvious—but what could they do? They tried writing on paper directly under their hands, so that what they wrote wouldn't appear on the walls. But if they used larger paper, too much was hidden—and if they had to move it they frequently lost their place entirely! You've seen those walls, how closely packed the writing is, how densely interwoven . . . No, unless they worked as closely as possible to my notes, there was no hope at all for them. And that meant they had to work right on the walls!"

He looked at me with such earnestness that I hesitated. –

"Go ahead, say it," he said. "What?"

"Just this," I said. "You know all this *now*, but for all you knew then, they *were* copying your notes and working on them elsewhere. Wasn't it possible that the whole thing—including those odd little errors—had been carefully planned to mislead you?"

"All right, suppose it was?"

"If it was planned to mislead you, how could you recognize which errors were meaningful and which weren't?"

"To a large extent I couldn't," Myshkin nodded.

"But you can now?"

"In some few instances, yes."

"Then you don't know what they're doing, do you?"

". . . Ahhhhh," said Myshkin, letting his breath out. "Is that what you were after? You went through all this just to try to find out if I knew what they were doing?"

"Or if there was any reason to think you might know," I said.

"And you couldn't ask me that directly?"

"Ask you?" I tried to smile. "If there was time to let you talk long enough, maybe your contradictions would add up to something."

Myshkin shook his head sadly. "Henry, I absolutely—"

"Not two minutes ago you said you had considered their errors too elementary and obvious to have been meant to mislead you. Right?"

"Yes."

"And half a minute ago you agreed that—errors and all—it *could* have been planned to mislead you. Don't tell me you overlooked that possibility at the time?"

"No, I did see it even at the time."

"And yet, with no apparent way of checking, you came to decisions that *some* errors were meaningless and others weren't? How? I'll tell you how. There's something left out, and that something is the real explanation for your decisions. Whatever it is, I'm satisfied that you have no intention of telling us."

"Suppose I now tell you *how* I came to those decisions?"

"Will it add up?" I said dryly.

"I hope so, Henry, for your sake," Myshkin said soberly. "You see, it was all trial and error. Take this formula I found. I took it at face value and worked at it for a few days, with no results. Then I had occasion to go to the darkroom again. I found what was essentially another version of the formula written beside the original. The only differences were some re-arranged symbols and changes of measure. So I tried the new

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version. Maybe if I hadn't dropped it I still wouldn't know what it could do—but once I knew, I concluded that the original version had been in error. Furthermore, it showed that at any rate I wasn't being completely misled, because here I'd come up with something that really had a function! Do you agree that until then, at least, I was thinking along logical lines?"

"I agree," I said.

"Good," said Myshkin. "Then I had that experience with the formula turning the machine's cover green, and another with the silk one I bought. And meanwhile, having found one error, I looked more carefully for others. They were there—just a few—based mostly on calculations of mine that they'd bawled up. That was when I began to wonder if it was possible that the green of the walls had anything to do with it—maybe it had manifested itself psychologically. All right?"

"All right," I said.

"Fine! I took the box I'd gotten to carry Boris and lined it with green velvet. I put Boris inside. The reaction was wonderful. He seemed to go into a deep fog. His reflexes slowed up and the resistance I'd sometimes-sensed in him seemed to disappear. I took him to the darkroom, questioned him, watched the answers he wrote. I made him copy things. Then I took him home and tried him again on the same stuff. Of course I was right, but it was a pretty hollow triumph. I realized that whatever information I'd gotten from Boris in that darkroom was not only questionable, but almost certainly full of mistakes. It was a bad blow, but there was some compensation—they were being hampered by this thing probably more than I was. And that's the way things were until the green apparently stopped affecting them recently. Does that answer you?"

"How do you know it stopped?" I said.

"For one thing, the green cover hasn't been effective, as you've had occasion to see. For another, last night when I carried Boris to the darkroom, neither the box nor the walls produced their former reaction. He tried to fake it but it was impossible; he really couldn't appreciate what it used to do to him. The answers he wrote for me were cockeyed, but clearly a purposeful cockeyed, and he distorted his handwriting far beyond any previous instance."

"I see," I said. "Do you remember saying that if you'd had some of the formula handy when Boris and his gunman were here, things might have ended differently? I asked you why, and you said: 'The color, for one.' But *now* you say that the color *doesn't* work anymore. How do you go about adding that one up?"

". . . I said it *apparently* doesn't work," Myshkin said slowly. "Boris isn't like the rest of them, you know. He's the only—"

"Is it by accident you haven't told us what this yellow powder is?" Siegman suddenly broke in.

". . . No?" said Myshkin. "I thought I told Henry."

"Not this Henry," I said.

"I give you my—"

"Just give me your answer," Siegman broke in. "What is it?"

Myshkin shrugged and said, "Exploded egg."

"Exploded egg?" said Siegman, looking at me.

"What the hell does that mean?" I said.

"Nothing very mysterious," said Myshkin, dourly. "Sometimes my egg experiments would blow up. The resultant dust, the residue, the suspension of particles—call it what you like—for some reason had a pronounced

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glutinous, adhesive quality."

I said, "Boris called it the powdered ashes of his friends."

"Mmmm," Myshkin nodded. "Poetic and not altogether untrue."

"Then how did—"

"Exactly! How did the powder get on Miss Hopper? You noticed she used the same word—*explosion?* Was there really an explosion of some sort? What did Boris do to produce it?"

"Maybe he learned how to explode eggs," I said.

"He's known how for a long time," Myshkin sighed. "But it wasn't an egg. Egg explosions go off with a loud pop like a paper bag. And they don't flash gold or anything else. No light at all; just a cloud of particles."

I nodded. "So you were popping eggs this morning?"

"You mean the powder on my clothes? As a matter of fact, yes."

"You had nothing better to do?"

". . . What are you driving at now?" Myshkin asked, frowning.

"What about the blood the police found on you?"

"That was my blood. I fell."

"On your hatchet or your knife?"

"I fell running after some of Boris' friends in the lots—and the knife and hatchet weren't mine. I found them in one of their hide-outs under the pier. I don't mind admitting I used them, either. Don't look at me like that, my dear fellow. It isn't a question of being humane, you know."

There was a pause, and Harriet said: "As soon as you gentlemen are ready?"

We'd almost forgotten the girls. They'd sat quietly on a crate and listened, but they were strangers in a strange land.

"Al, what time is it?" I said.

He was leaning over the work-table, thumbing through a small notebook of Myshkin's that had been lying open near the test-tube rack. Except for his sudden question about the yellow powder and his short-lived interest in Myshkin's answer, it was impossible to tell if he had followed or understood the rest of it. He turned another page, nodded to himself, and then looked at his watch.

"Eight-twenty-four," he said.

"Really, Mr. Myshkin," said Harriet, "if it'll take much longer I think perhaps we can postpone it."

"It'll only take a minute after it's ready," Myshkin said.

"Please try to hurry," said Harriet. "I don't think Gladys is feeling well."

"I beg your pardon?" Gladys blinked. "Is something supposed to be the matter with me?"

"Darling, your eyes look so *bright?*" Harriet frowned and looked to Siegman. "Almost feverish, wouldn't you say?"

"But darling, I feel just wonderful!" said Gladys.

"Oh, darling, I wish you could see what your eyes look like," said Harriet. "Darling, they're so far away?"

"Darling," Gladys smiled distantly, "I was just day-dreaming."

"You were breathing so *heavily* a moment ago, darling."

". . . Was I, darling?"

"*Yes,* darling. And you clutched my *arm.*"

"Stop right there, girls," Siegman said dryly. "She says she feels fine and she looks fine. Pulse normal, breathing regular, and no coat on her tongue."

"But you haven't even *looked* at her tongue!" said Harriet.

"I saw it every time she said *darling,*" Siegman said. "Listen, Myshkin, this compound's as ready as it'll ever be. I'm getting anxious to see what you'll say when it doesn't work."

"Mr. Myshkin, is that true?" said Harriet.

"My dear Miss Hopper," Myshkin

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smiled gently, "I give you my word I'm not wasting your time. I don't know why Doctor Siegman suspects me of such pointless chicanery, but perhaps he—"

Siegman said impatiently: "You know what this compound is?"

"What goes into it, you mean?" Myshkin asked. "Certainly I know. You've been reading my notes, so you know too. It's just a green liquid, isn't it? You don't mean it's something that has a name? Is that it?"

Siegman studied his face. "No, not all of it."

"You mean part of it?"

"Stop playing, Myshkin."

"Let's everybody stop playing," I said. "Al, what is it?"

Siegman turned to me and shrugged. "I don't know what it is or what it's supposed to be, but it's got chlorophyll for a base. C-fifty-five, H-seventy-two, O-five, N-four, Mg. What are called complex esters; soluble in ether, alcohol, etcetera, but not in water. There's a lot of other stuff here, some to give it color, some to make it bubble, and more that doesn't mean much to me, but the main thing is that it has the pyrrole nucleus. You find the same thing in hematin."

"What's hematin?" I said.

"The red coloring matter of the blood. It's formed by the decomposition of hemoglobin."

"Is it important?"

"I don't know."

"Gentlemen, please!" Myshkin said softly. "Let's not get lost." His eyes wandered along the work table but he wasn't interested in anything there, not even in the tube of green liquid that he picked up and held before him. "The problem is a concrete one," he nodded. "Will this do what I said it will, or won't it? Miss Hopper, may I have the coat, please? Just put it down here. Thank you."

Harriet laid the coat across the back of the armchair and Myshkin took one of his grimy towels and spilled some of the green liquid on it. He was still nodding to himself, and Siegman openly scowled at me.

"You don't think it's dangerous, do you?" I said to Siegman.

"I hope so," Myshkin murmured. "I hope so . . ."

"And what the hell are *you* talking about?" I said.

". . . Hmmmmm? Weren't you talking to me?"

"What is this?" I said. "Isn't anyone here talking to anyone else? Ever since Harriet got back you've all been taking turns at wandering off to a private dreamland. I could understand what happened to Harriet, but then Siegman caught it, then Gladys, and now you, Myshkin. Hasn't anyone else noticed it? If this is a mass daze, why can't I get in on it?"

"You've been in one for years," said Siegman.

"Myshkin, what did that last crack of yours mean?" I demanded.

"It meant he's going to destroy the coat," said Siegman.

"Oh!" Gladys gasped, "Mr. Myshkin, is there any chance—"

Myshkin gave her a slight, re-assuring smile. He spilled a little more of his compound on the towel, blew on it and then leaned over the armchair. As he began to rub one of the coat lapels, we silently gathered around. The instant the towel touched the yellow powder stains it was clear that Myshkin's promise would be kept. In fact, the surprising ease of the process made his deliberate operations seem quite unnecessary. I moved around to the back of the chair where I could see something of Myshkin's face. He was thinking about something again and his lips were moving. I

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shook my head and gave up.

"What're you shaking your head about?" asked Siegman.

"About every other minute," I said.

"Mr. Myshkin, *you're* a darling," Gladys breathed.

"Let's wait and see what he is," said Siegman.

"He thinks your coat's made of hemoglobin," I said.

"Oh, but it isn't," said Gladys. "It's all wool."

"Shhhh!" Myshkin said suddenly. "— Listen!"

We all froze to attention. I listened and listened.

"All I hear is the sink," I said.

"It takes a drip to know one," said Siegman.

"Gentlemen," Myshkin said softly, "perhaps now you can see what I meant about this compound being dangerous. Observe its effects. On the one hand, as Henry so astutely commented, we've all manifested an occasional trance-like state . . ." He paused to listen again for a moment and then sighed, ". . . While on the other, we find a remarkable hostility among us. Isn't it odd for such friends as we to be at each other's throats like this?"

"Not for such friends as we," said Siegman. "What do you keep listening for? Are you expecting someone? Is that what this stall is all about?"

"He's waiting for Boris to come back," I said. "He's got some kind of theory about his compound that he wants to try."

"Without me," said Siegman. "He's through with the coat—"

"Sit down, Doctor," said Myshkin. "You aren't going anywhere."

The way Myshkin said it, it didn't mean anything . . . until we saw that the compound had been replaced in his hand by a gun. He'd pulled it out from under the armchair, not pointing it at anyone, but then the real shock came.

It was the black automatic I'd seen in the gunman's hand.

Harriet and Gladys let out a united gasp and held their breaths.

". . . Myshkin," I said, "listen to me. Don't—"

"Be quiet, Henry," Myshkin said wearily. "If you'd listened as carefully as I have until now, you'd understand. Ladies, you have nothing to fear, on my word. Doctor, I asked you to sit down."

Siegman regarded him steadily. "I'm still leaving," he said. "I want to see if you're crazy enough to use that gun."

"Desperate is a better word," said Myshkin.

Siegman took a step. As he did so, Myshkin raised the gun to his own temple.

"If anyone leaves I'll kill myself," he said quietly.

I counted ten drops of water in the sink and five more falling from my forehead to my cheeks.

"Myshkin, put the gun down," I said. "We'll stay."

"Give me your word."

I nodded.

Siegman said, "I had no idea. believe me . . ."

"I know," Myshkin said brokenly. He stood there nodding to himself, shivering in his sleazy hospital robe, suddenly so pathetic a figure that it was as if a mask had fallen—only with Myshkin one couldn't quite be sure whether it had fallen off or on. ". . . I've had to keep things from you. I admit it. But I never dreamed Boris could turn up with an armed killer . . . and why you should think I'd be trying to keep you here if I were expecting him back . . . to expose you to such fearful—"

Off went the doorbell again.

"Boris!" I said.

"Police!" said Myshkin. He ran to the threshold and picked up the bundle of

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his clothes. "Remember what I told you to say!" he croaked. He brought the gun up. "If there's any double-cross, I swear they won't take me alive!" Then, scarcely making a sound, he vaulted down the stairs.

I waited until the door to the lower room closed on him and went down. The bell had rung a couple of more times before I opened the front door. There was Nulty—the detective who specialized in theories that stank a little.

"Hello, lieutenant," he said warmly. "Everything okay?"

"Sure." I said. "Why?"

"Supposed to be females screaming or something, hah?"

I looked past him and saw two cops with rifles waiting idly a few yards away.

"Just in fun," I grinned.

"I never have any fun," said Nulty. "Why is that, I often wonder?" He came in with a small, mournful smile of gratitude, like a man accepting charity. "I heard about your visitors," he said and gave me a playful poke in the stomach, and before I could say a word he was climbing the stairs.

There was nothing to do but follow him up and introduce him to the girls. He bowed to them and threw Siegman a friendly nod. "Remind me, Doctor, I've a message for you," he murmured, and turned to ask me: "Not interfering with a party, am I? Special occasion of some kind?"

"Neither," I said. "We just happen to be here."

"Oh," said Nulty, looking pleased.

"I thought the police had left this area?" I said.

"Well, not entirely," said Nulty. His eyes had been traveling from the moment he'd entered, except for brief stopovers on Gladys, but now it became apparent that he had found two additional points of interest. One of these was the work table where Myshkin had recently brewed his green potion. The other was the towels I had used to shade the light when Myshkin first returned; they were lying under the sink where Myshkin must have tossed them after replacing the bulb the gunman had smashed, and the remains of that bulb were plainly visible in the folds of the towels. Nulty kept looking at it with a baffled smile, as if there was a joke here that required a little thinking.

"We tried to dim—" I began, but he cut me off.

"Don't," he said mildly. "Just tell me why you're here."

"I'm going through Myshkin's effects," I said.

"And making experiments with test tubes?"

"That's cleaning fluid."

Nulty's eyebrows eloquently indicated humorous doubt.

"Would you like a demonstration?" I said.

"Oh, no," said Nulty. "It might work—then what becomes of my theory?" He clasped hands and cracked his knuckles. "I only dropped in to see about the screaming one of the cops said came from here. We've more or less finished our search, but the neighborhood's still under light surveillance. Well, good night," he finished, and turned to go.

"Then you haven't caught anyone?" Siegman asked suddenly.

"Not a sign," said Nulty, heading for the door, but when he reached it he stopped. "Amazing, really. Every shred of evidence we've collected points to one conclusion—whoever was responsible for the robbery never left this immediate vicinity. But the only people we've come across all day, aside from watchmen and so on, are you nice people—and we know none of you was here at the actual time of the robbery . . ." He paused, and added diffidently, "Well,

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maybe we don't know about *all* of you but it seems likely. Now take you, Miss De Winter—where were you at seven-thirty this morning, may I ask?"

There was a moment of silence before Gladys lifted her gaze from the floor and said, "I distinctly heard my name spoken. Don't tell me I day-dreamed *that?*"

"She isn't feeling well," said Harriet, biting her lip.

"Darling, you keep saying that," said Gladys, looking perplexed. "I feel perfectly *marvelous!*—Just a little dazed, maybe, as if I'd had something funny to drink . . ."

"She hasn't had anything funny to drink," I said.

"She doesn't need anything funny to drink," said Siegman.

Nulty smiled.

"Anyway," said Harriet, "I can tell you where she was at seven-thirty this morning because she was home with me."

"Oh? Miss DeWinter lives with you?"

"No, she lives alone, but she came over at about seven."

"At about seven," said Nulty, nodding. "That early?"

"The circumstances were very odd, but if you insist—"

"Not at all, Miss Hopper," said Nulty gallantly. "I know a bunch of early-Sunday-morning visitors when I meet 'em. Odd circumstances only tend to confuse matters. The significant thing is that you're all accounted for, and very simply. Miss De Winter visited you, and the Lieutenant visited the Doctor. Everyone can vouch for everyone else—not," he added with a laugh, "that anyone needs it. Good night."

"What about that message you had for me?" said Siegman.

"Oh, yes," said Nulty, turning back again. "It's from your resident friend at Bellevue. I had a talk with him just before I came up here. Matter of fact, I was able to help him out of a tough spot, I think. He'd given Mr. Myshkin special attention, and they seemed to feel he might be involved. But I remembered how intelligent you'd been about the whole thing, and I assured the authorities he had nothing to do with it—least of all on your account. But it's a first class mystery, all right."

"Are you talking about Myshkin's escape?" said Siegman.

"What else?"

"Then why didn't you say so?"

"You seem to have understood me easily enough."

"Listen, Mr. Nulty, I know about Myshkin's escape because my friend phoned and told me," Siegman said evenly. "I'm sorry to hear it's made trouble for him, but that's all I know about it. Don't go getting any ideas."

"What kind of ideas?" said Nulty. "And what would I have to base them on? Mr Myshkin was there one minute and gone the next—vanished into thin air—just like the robbery this morning, to make an idle comparison. Of course, artistic disappearances do have a certain appeal for a detective, but—"

"Frankly, I haven't the slightest interest in the subject," said Siegman. "Do you still remember the message?"

"He told me to tell you to drop dead," said Nulty.

"Thank you. Western Union couldn't have done better."

"Well," said Nulty pleasantly, "a third and last good—"

"Mr. Nulty," Harriet interrupted, "do you really think it's possible those robbers are somewhere around here?"

Nulty shrugged. "I wish I knew what to say, Miss Hopper."

"That's good enough. Gladys, darling, we're going."

"Oh, but I'm staying, darling," said Gladys.

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"Sure, it's early," I said. "What's the rush?"

Harriet studied me through narrowing eyes. "I have a good mind to answer that question," she said slowly. "Ready, Gladys?"

"Darling, I'm *very* happy here. You go, I'll stay."

"You're leaving with me, darling," said Harriet firmly.

What a big, beautiful smile Nulty had . . .

"We're all leaving," I said. The floor was turning to fresh quicksand under my feet, and I had the feeling that if I let a quarrel develop, I'd find myself in the room below with Myshkin—where one was already a crowd. "I had no idea it was so late," I said as I struck a vigilant pose with an arm raised, ready to switch off the light.

"Anyone want a lift uptown in a squad car?" said Nulty.

"Don't trouble," said Siegman. "I'll call an ambulance."

They all went down together. When I heard the front door close I turned off the light and felt my way to the dark stairs. As I reached them, a flashlight at the bottom snapped on, and I heard Nulty's voice: "Watch your step, lieutenant." My feet were numb, but I managed the descent. "You'll never guess why I stayed behind," Nulty was saying, and I wondered if he had guessed that I had become a chunk of ice.

But I could still talk. I said, "If the police department can run a message service and a chauffeur service, why not an usher service?"

"Hah!" said Nulty appreciatively. "Quite a compliment and very true—because, you know, I'd almost forgotten we also run a small policing service. As long as I'm here, I ought to look into that downstairs room, don't you think?"

"W-w-w-why?"

"Just to make sure Mr. Myshkin isn't in it."

"How could he be— I mean, how could he be?"

"I can't say," said Nulty, "but if he can vanish one place, maybe he can appear in another."

He shot the beam down the corridor and went ahead. When I followed, I attained a deep understanding of what it was like to walk The Last Mile. Nulty had switched on the light by the time I entered the room, and it took just one glance to find the unmistakable evidence that his quarry was still there—Myshkin's bundled old shoes, tattered pants and green sweater lying on the floor not far away near a pile of corrugated cardboard cartons. It could only be a matter of moments before Nulty spotted them. There were half a dozen places where Myshkin could have hidden, but none of them was any good, not the way Nulty went at them. He'd picked up a five-foot section of slender pipe and poked the possibilities one after another. When he got to the cartons, he moved Myshkin's bundle aside with a foot and jabbed the pipe around. I was ready. Psychologically, I mean; I'd even the defense I'd make in court: "Your Honor, this man, this brave soldier of his country's forces overseas, is not a lawbreaker, but rather, a man who has seen so much violence that it never—" But nothing happened. Nulty eliminated one place after another—all but the forge and its chimney, which for some reason he had apparently discounted—and the search was over.

Nulty sighed. "How nice if he'd been here," he said, and he shook his head. "That's the trouble being a student of vanishing acts. You want to have a talk with someone good at it, but those who are good at it stay vanished. Sorry to have kept you, lieutenant," he said, and led the way out.

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I turned off the light and went to the front door with him. I opened it, let him out. The minute he stepped into the street, I said, "Oh, I forgot something!" and quickly closed the door. Then I turned the lock an extra time, leaned against the door, took two or three long breaths and hurried back to the downstairs room. At the time it seemed to me that I had to tell Myshkin where we were going, and how careful he'd have to be.

I didn't want to have any light, but it would have been impossible to get to the forge in darkness without stumbling all over the place, so on it went. It was a good thing I'd stopped for those quick breaths, because I needed them now. The bundle of clothes had moved. Oh, I was sure, all right. I remembered very well where it had been when I first saw it, and where Nulty had moved it with his big foot. I hadn't been able to take my eyes off it most of the time Nulty was searching, so I was sure. The bundle had moved—and not just a few inches, say, but about two yards.

"Myshkin!" I whispered. "Myshkin, it's me—Henry!"

Nothing.

"Myshkin, where are you? Make a sound! It's all right!"

Still nothing, so that apparently settled it, and Myshkin was back either in the forge or even the chimney. But he wasn't in the forge, and when I called up the chimney, there was no answer. I kept calling, "Myshkin, it's Henry—I know you're here! Believe me, Myshkin, it's safe to answer! Why don't—"

At this point, Nulty said, "Hah—A skeptic!"

And there was Nulty standing at the door in his socks, his shoes in his hands, beaming at me and chuckling.

"Not that I blame you," he said, carefully picking his way toward me on tiptoe. "I thought of it myself. But I felt that for a man of Mr. Myshkin's superior accomplishments, the chimney was an insulting—" and here he gingerly stepped on Myshkin's bundle to detour around the cartons "—suspicion. Still, I feel responsible for putting the notion into your mind—" and now he placed his shoes on the floor beside me and took out his flashlight "—so maybe I'd better — Anything wrong, lieutenant? You're green. Here now, let me help you . . ."

He sat me down on a box beside the forge, so I sat.

Then he stuck his head part way up the chimney, played the light around, and laughed. Of course, where his head was, the laugh had a hollow ring, but when he took it out, the laugh sounded more hollow than before.

"You see?" he said. "Not there at all!" and he put on his shoes, chuckling away. "But just in case you think I've been careless about it . . ."

He found the long pipe he had used before and went through that room with terrible thoroughness. He moved everything at least once—and Myshkin's bundle, twice—chuckling louder and louder, and there was no Myshkin to be found.

The way Nulty stood there looking at me, all I could think of was a song I used to know, called *Me and Brother Bill,* where the words went:

"Brother Bill said, 'Boy, whut's a-matter wid you?'
If he'd a-knowed like I, he'd a-run some too! . . ."

When finally we were both out in the street, Nulty pressed something into my hand. It was a key. "For the front door. It was under some of this stuff when I got here," said Nulty. He meant the yellow powder under our feet, just outside the door.

"Then you didn't have to ring the bell?" I said.

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"No," said Nulty, with a deep sigh, "I could have walked in right off. But you know how it is with a thing like this—you've got a key, it's like an ace in the hole, you don't play it too soon. If I frightened you, I'm sorry."

Siegman and the girls were standing at the corner with the cops with the rifles. We started walking toward them.

"Did you really think Myshkin was in the house?" I said.

He nodded solemnly. "A mistake," he confessed. "You must think I'm a pretty lousy detective."

I almost said something. It was a very tempting opening; I was on the verge of taking a parting shot at him. But he'd made one slight miscalculation. We were close enough to the corner by then to have come within the range of the double street lights, and I caught that almost imperceptible sly look in his eyes I'd seen there when he first asked Gladys where she'd been at seven-thirty in the morning. So I shut up, and it was a good thing I did, because Nulty had a parting shot of his own.

"Still," he said, "it's probably not important. How far can an escaped nut get before he's caught? Especially when he's got on a pair of old, torn shoes, a ragged pair of pants stained with yellow powder, and a hooded green sweater?"

"I DON'T want to have anything more to do with it!" Harriet said. "I don't want to discuss it or hear it discussed, and both of you get out of my apartment!" Then she sank down on the couch and made small, feminine sounds of despair. "I just want to lie here and tell myself it never happened . . . I'm so tired . . . so very tired . . ."

"It's about time," said Siegman.

"Isn't it incredible she bore up so *long?*" said Gladys.

"Remind me to write the Museum of Unnatural History about shrinking your head," said Siegman. "Come on, Henry, we'll make some drinks."

We went to the kitchen and got busy with corkscrews and cracked ice. I said I questioned the wisdom of leaving Gladys with Harriet, but Siegman said it didn't matter.

"I wouldn't worry about Harriet," he said. "She's a remarkably strong girl, all things considered. She'll work it out for herself one way or another. But Gladys is really a problem. Something's the matter with her—I mean something specifically the result of this afternoon and evening—but trying to find out what's wrong with Gladys is like the needle in the haystack." He thought it over and added, "If I could indulge myself in a mild fantasy, I'd say Gladys acts as if she's under a spell . . ."

"Hypnotized, maybe?" I said, trying not to grin.

"It's not funny," said Siegman gloomily. "I hope it's not serious."

We sampled the drinks. They weren't bad, and we sat there sipping away and pondering in liquid silence.

"You know," said Siegman, "maybe you had something there—maybe we've all been exposed to some sort of group hypnotism. All I know is it's an impossible business to keep on one's mind for very long. I wonder what a good night's sleep will do for us."

"What do you think about Myshkin's bundle of clothes?" I said.

"You mean why Nulty didn't say anything about them until you'd both left?"

"No," I said. "Nulty can be explained as a foxy operator. He saw the clothes and obviously knew all about them from the start—but I'm the only one who knows they moved by themselves."

"You mean *apparently* moved by themselves."

"What do you mean I mean apparently? They did move by themselves."

"Well, of course, that's nonsense, so

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we won't go into it."

"Now, listen—"

"What difference does it make?" said Siegman. "We know Myshkin was in that room and we know he got out—"

"How?" I said.

"Haven't we been through that?" Siegman said wearily.

"Just try tracing his possible exit and you'll see what I mean," I said.

He sighed. "All right. First Nulty rang. Then Myshkin went down into the room. He couldn't have left the house by the front door while Nulty was upstairs with us, because there were a couple of watchful cops right outside in the street. We also know that Myshkin had no intention of leaving the house because he'd have changed clothes—"

"Objection," I said.

"We'll come back to it," said Siegman. "To me it seems reasonable that he'd have put on his shoes, pants and sweater if he was going to try to escape from the place. True enough, he could appreciate the fact that any alarm out for him would detail the clothes he was wearing—but don't tell me he thought he'd attract less attention moving around New York streets wearing a Bellevue Hospital robe and pajamas?"

"All right," I said, "but remember my objection at this point."

"To my dying day," said Siegman. "So there he was, not anticipating any necessity to escape. Remember, he told us right from the start, almost the first minute after he'd returned, that if the police came looking for him we'd have to talk them out of making a search of the house because there was no place for him to hide. Things seemed to be working out for him. Nulty and the girls and I went downstairs, but Nulty opened the door, let us out and he stayed behind. Then you put out the upstairs light and started down. Right so far?"

"Go on," I said.

"Then Nulty picked you up with his flashlight. According to what you've told me, you spent about a minute in the hall with him, during which he said very plainly that he wanted to have a look in that downstairs room. So at that moment Myshkin knew that Nulty was coming in to look for him. He had maybe twenty or thirty seconds at most to duck. We also know, from what followed that the only place he could have ducked then was in the forge or up in the chimney, because you say Nulty went through everything with a long pipe, but he didn't look either at the forge or the chimney. Furthermore, the forge-chimney theory has a logical ring to it—it's just the sort of place that anyone caught in that room with no time to find a spot to hide would run for . . ."

He reached for another drink, swallowed it and poured another for me.

"Notice what an orderly mind I have?" he said.

"Absolutely," I said. "You'd have made a wonderful orderly in the army."

"Care for some ice?" he said. "I'd like to see you being kept on ice."

"The suggestion leaves me cold," I said. "Go on, orderly mind."

"Yes. Well, Myshkin was in the forge chimney while Nulty was searching for him. I think we can safely say that he had no expectation of going undiscovered. Maybe he was ready with the gun—maybe if Nulty had found him at that time, he'd have tried to shoot his way out. All right, I won't argue it; he might have just given up. However, I don't for a moment accept the idea that he would have shot himself. Whatever it was, fortunately Nulty was being exceptionally crafty, in his feeble-minded way—"

"You should be so feeble-minded," I said.

"—and, having already spotted Myshkin's clothes," Siegman went on without

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deigning to argue, "he decided to give you a little more rope. Obviously, he was sure Myshkin was there, but he was trying to find out things—he wasn't just fooling when he told us that Myshkin's escape from the hospital baffled them—and he must have been hoping to uncover some clue that would help him understand how Myshkin had managed it. Anyway, he went to the front door with you, let you lock him out because he had the key—"

"You call that feeble-minded?" I said.

"I do," said Siegman affably. "It has all the superficial glitter of a smart move, but what happened? You locked the door, made a remark about having forgotten something and back you went. Then you turned the light on again and were shocked senseless—why? Because the clothes had moved. It is to laugh," he said, and uttered an arid noise. "Does this require an explanation?" he asked in disgust. "Myshkin had just about had time to breathe a black prayer of thanks to his guardian demon for deliverance—you'd turned off the light and gone out with Nulty, and there he was, apparently saved from discovery. He sneaked out of the forge-chimney and immediately went for his clothes. That bundle must have been on his mind all the time he was hiding. It seemed to him they must have given him away the instant they were spotted, unless—I say this because he certainly could not have expected Nulty to see the clothes and not say anything—unless you had managed to conceal them somehow when you first came in . . ."

"Stop reading Myshkin's mind and just recite facts," I said.

"Mind-reading only irritates illiterates," he said. "These facts of mine are highly factual facts. Pour me another, fool. So Myshkin sneaked out, went for his clothes, just about found them—bango! he hears the front door close and you saying that you forgot something, and you're coming back. Well, he knew by then that the clothes had been out in the open all the time—and even if he didn't suspect why Nulty hadn't said anything about them—the last thing he wanted then was you coming back. So he dropped the clothes and beat it back to the forge—"

"Wait a minute," I said.

"Shut up," said Siegman. "Then you came into the room, turned on the light and started calling Myshkin's name, and telling him it was all right, that it was safe to answer. Well, maybe he heard the front door opening again—it may be a lot easier to hear it from up front where the forge is than from back in the room where you were—or maybe he just wasn't taking any chances with a moron who would expose him to such a risk after he narrowly escaped. Whatever it was, he just climbed up the chimney and the hell with you. He knew that hanging around in there with you whispering it was safe to come out—"

"Enough," I said.

"Good," said Siegman. "Logic has you by the throat?"

"No, nausea," I said. "So you say Myshkin went up the chimney?"

"Unless I am to doubt your evaluation of Nulty's thoroughness in searching that room, which seems like a pointless quibble. But that was the only way—up the chimney, across the roof, and down into the yard in the back. I will state frankly and freely that I don't like the chimney-climbing angle very much, but we know it is unquestionably possible."

"And now may I have a few words?"

"The fewer the better."

"In the first place," I said, "if Myshkin was still in the room after I went out with Nulty, he couldn't possibly have come out of either the forge or the chimney, gotten to his clothes, then gotten back to the chimney and away—be-

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cause he'd have had to do the whole thing in approximately ten seconds. Fifteen at most. It's impossible to move around in that room with any speed at all, no matter how familiar one might be with what's in it. Furthermore, after Nulty's first search of that room, Myshkin's familiarity—if it were at all possible—would only have been a handicap, because too many things are moved. You can't tell me that Myshkin could do all that in the time it took me to walk to the front door and get back. Even if somehow he could, and had managed to get back to the chimney before I got the lights on again, I'd have heard him in the chimney. No human being can squeeze and climb his way up a chimney without making some slight sound. I admit that this sort of objection doesn't have the brilliance of your theory—it merely destroys it. I say Myshkin didn't have time. Okay?"

"No," said Siegman.

"I'm glad we agree," I said. "In the second place, your deductions about Myshkin's preference of his clothes to that hospital robe and pajamas—you remember I objected—do not impress me."

"No?" said Siegman, with an elaborate show of disinterest.

"No, I think there's something doing with those clothes."

"For instance, what?"

"I don't know—" I began.

"Next question," said Siegman. "What else don't you know that you're willing to argue about?"

"If you'll recall Myshkin's account of his supposedly magical escape from the hospital," I said, "he made a point of remarking how everything had gone off beautifully except that his clothes weren't where they were supposed to be. Now, ordinarily I wouldn't have thought twice about that remark, except that when I got back to the room downstairs, it struck me that I could have said the same thing—*those clothes were not where they were supposed to be.* Doesn't that indicate some sort of coincidence that's meaningful?"

"Now that you mention it," said Siegman, "I'd say yes—it indicates a coincidence that's meaningless."

"Furthermore," I went on, "consider the circumstance of Boris returning here with a gunman—and for some reason bringing along Myshkin's clothes. What a remarkable thing to do! Boris comes with an apparent intent to have Myshkin shot or tortured or something, but he bothers to bring back those rags! And not only that, but Myshkin was struck by it too. You remember how frightened he was when he first saw Boris' killer? Of all the things to comment on, Myshkin said: 'You didn't forget my clothes.' I don't know why he said it, but when you begin to add up all the little side issues that one way or another involve those clothes, don't you start wondering about them? Be honest, Al, don't you?"

After a moment, Siegman nodded and said, "All right, yes."

"Good. Now take everything I've said and start adding that up, and here's what you get, I think: First, that Myshkin was already gone from the downstairs room by the time Nulty and I went in. I'll go so far as to say that because of the cops outside, the chimney does seem to be the answer as to how he got out. But, second, he left those clothes behind on purpose. I don't know why. Your argument that he'd be more conspicuous in his robe and pajamas than in his clothes can't be refuted, but my feeling is that for one reason or another it was more important not to take the clothes, not to change into them, than it was to risk going around in pajamas."

"Wait," said Siegman. "What if he

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knew where to get some other clothes on the outside? Didn't he appreciate the fact that they'd be a dead give-away that he'd been back to the house? Why not take them with him and throw them away somewhere?"

I said, "There's only one answer: Myshkin wanted those clothes right there on the premises."

"If he wanted them on the premises, and if he knew they'd be a giveaway, why didn't he do something intelligent about them? Why let them lay around in full view of anyone coming into that room? Why not at least hide them in that room?"

"Exactly," I said. "And my theory is that he did hide them."

"But you said they weren't hidden."

"Let me put it this way: Myshkin hid them, but they didn't stay hidden."

"Oh," said Siegman, "we're back to that, are we?"

"Yes—that bundle of clothes not only moved by itself in between the two times I went into that room—but they also moved by themselves after Myshkin had taken some slight trouble, at least, to hide them."

"It's a theory worthy of Nulty," said Siegman, and he finished his drink and got up. "Personally, I'm still strong for finding out where Boris developed that odd vocabulary of his. Now if you could get an idea about that—"

"If you don't like the way I've worked this clothes angle—"

"Forget it. It's a dead end."

"—There's always the alternative," I went on. "Suppose there was something to what Myshkin said about invisibility? That way he might still have been in the room, and the clothes wouldn't necessarily have had to move by themselves. It isn't so much—"

"It's less than that. Why don't you listen to what you're saying? What kind of ideas are you operating on? One is that clothes go waltzing around of their own free will; the other is invisibility."

"Well, where do you stop in an affair like this?"

"At the first convenient stop. For me it's a small common sense problem based on trying out something about Boris' vocabulary."

"And how do you go about it?"

"I have an idea," said Siegman. "You hold down the fort, I'll go out a minute and get some newspapers. Maybe there'll be something in it for me."

"Look in the obituaries," I said.

Siegman went out then and I mixed up a batch of new drinks and brought it in to the girls. Harriet was feeling considerably better, a condition I felt was largely due to the fact that Gladys was sitting off by herself at the window, staring out into space almost as blank as she. The drinks were sweetly welcomed by both, but did nothing about promoting conversation with either, and I found a chair and went on thinking about things.

The key that Nulty had given me was an interesting piece of business but it led me nowhere. The fact that it had been found, according to Nulty, in the pile of yellow dust outside the door, seemed to indicate that it had been connected one way or another with Boris' entrance to Myshkin's house. Of course, Boris was too small to have been able to use the key himself—which meant that his gunman friend had used it, but why it should have been dropped . . . There I was going off on one of those tangents again. Why did everything that had happened have to be part of some great plan? Didn't people accidentally drop keys? Why couldn't this key have been dropped by accident?

But of this I was sure—that Nulty hadn't just returned the key to me with such sweetness and light, because it didn't belong to him. If that key was

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useful to him in his theorizing about Myshkin, it was still useful in any further plans he might have. He'd told me about the key because it would have come out anyway—Siegman had seen him using the key to get back in—but I could be sure that before Nulty returned it, he'd made a copy of it, a wax impression or a drawing or something. Nulty would have a duplicate of that key, for later use, when it suited him. His turning the key over to me was meant only to throw me off guard and make his secret possession of a key worth something.

Well, I was playing with that kind of unprofitable speculation when the phone went off. Harriet looked at me, I started to get up, and Gladys, who was closest to the darkroom where the phone was, but who seemed farthest away, shot out of her chair and went to answer it. I still had enough respect for Gladys not to want to get into a darkroom with her, so I let it go. But not Harriet. Harriet left the couch and took up an unabashed listening post with her ear to the door, which Gladys had immediately closed.

She listened briefly, then carefully turned the knob and opened the door a trifle. A few seconds more of that and she burst into the room.

"Now, darling, please don't!" I heard Gladys say.

"Darling, you give me that phone!" said Harriet.

"But Mr. Myshkin's explaining something very important, darling!"

That was all it took to get me there fast, but I arrived in time to see Harriet holding the phone, delivering: "Mr. Myshkin, you must have gotten a wrong number!" and slamming the connection shut with a bang.

Without another word, Gladys marched out of the darkroom. I stepped to one side and let Harriet handle it. She caught Gladys halfway across the living-room and sat her down with a certain amount of friendly firmness, then took the seat opposite on the couch.

"Where are you going, darling?" she asked.

"Darling, I know you won't approve. You know, we're different people."

"No, darling, we're people, but you're different. I make no bones about eavesdropping, darling, and I heard you tell Mr. Myshkin you'd be there as soon as you could make it. Darling, make what?—and where?"

Gladys smiled mysteriously. "To that wonderful, wonderful house on Forcible Tub Drive. Oh, dear, that sounds wrong, doesn't it, darling?"

"Yes, darling you've got it backwards. It's Tubicle Forks Boulevard."

"It doesn't matter, darling, I remember how to get there."

"*Do* you, darling? And why were you going to go there?"

"Oh, I wasn't *going* to go, darling—I'm *going*."

"Yes, of course, you dear sweet girl, but why?"

"I promised Mr. Myshkin I wouldn't say a word to anyone, darling."

"Oh, I'm *sure* you won't, darling, but why were you going?"

"He said he's expecting Boris," said Gladys, looking around with a conspiratorial expression that could have gotten her a job on the spy staff of half a dozen Balkan embassies. "And," she whispered, "that perfectly adorable friend of his will be along!"

Harriet let out a deep sigh, said "Really, darling?" and looked at me.

"And," Gladys went on, scarcely able to contain herself, "there may even be some others, darling, who are just as romantic and dashing as Boris' friend. Now aren't you sorry you didn't let me finish talking to him?"

"Yes, darling," Harriet said softly. "I think under the circumstances the only

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thing for me to do is telephone him immediately and apologize. Henry—"

"But he said there was no time to lose, darling! Let's just go!"

"Darling, it's so much more comfortable here. I'll tell you what. You go to the kitchen with Henry and start making a very special drink Henry told me about. It's Mr. Myshkin's favorite, and I'm sure all his friends will just love it, darling. Won't they, Henry?"

"Harriet—" I said, and got no further.

"Meanwhile, darling, I'll do all the necessary telephoning," Harriet had gone right on, turning to me with a smile that finally let me understand she was up to something. "Henry, lover-man, you *do* remember how to mix that very *special* drink, don't you?"

"Like it was yesterday," I said. "Come, Gladys, baby . . ."

I felt like the witch in *Hansel Und Gretel* when I led Gladys into the kitchen. It took me five minutes just to assemble the ingredients. I started by mixing vodka and benedictine, added a dash of Pernod, chili powder, Greek brandy, Haitian rum so thick a spoon would stand in it, a touch of paregoric, cloves, and with that for a beginning, I decided to go on more imaginatively. Pretty soon I had a champagne bucket full of a liquid that was apparently eating into the silver. At this stage I opened two bottles of Mexican beer and instructed Gladys how to pour it into the general mixture a few drops at a time, never letting up the stirring, and cautioned her that the whole magnificent creation would go flat unless she repeated the proper incantation.

With that I left her, and I could hear her dutifully repeating in an awed voice: "Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings . . ."

Harriet was at the door to the darkroom, busy on the phone. She looked as if things weren't going too well for her. "Can't find him," she said, dialing.

"Who, Myshkin?"

"Don't be silly. I'm trying to track down Roscoe. You remember him, don't you—Roscoe Cramwell, the actor?"

"Yes, the fat one? The one who was outside on Gladys' fire-escape?"

She nodded. "Hello, Armand's? Is Roscoe Cramwell there, please? No? Well, do you know where he is? No idea at all? If he should come in, will you tell him to call Gladys at Harriet's home, please? Thank you." She hung up.

"Why Roscoe?" I said.

"You want Gladys to go to Myshkin?" she asked, dialing again.

"Certainly not."

"Do you know what it's like trying to stop Gladys when she's got her wee mind set on something—particularly something like going to Myshkin's house?"

"I see. That's for Roscoe to do?"

"He's the only one who can handle her, if I can find—Hello, Tony? This is Harriet Hopper . . ." She went through it again with no success and left the same message. "Fifth place I've tried," she said, concentrating with a frown on her lovely forehead. "One saw him this afternoon. He's evidently been on a bat since early this morning. By now there's no telling what condition he's in or even where he's likely to be. How are you doing with what you're doing?"

"I'm afraid to look at it."

"You're a darling," she said, and leaned over and kissed me lightly on the chin. "Try to get a pint of it into Gladys. I'll keep phoning."

She was dialing again when I started back to the kitchen, and when I got there, Gladys was pouring the last of the Mexican beer.

"Try it, darling?" she sang.

I dipped a measuring cup into the stuff, came up with three ounces and

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drained it with no trouble. The kiss on my chin was still moist, and after that no drink on earth could mean a thing. But as a matter of fact, the drink tasted fine and I said so.

"Yes, darling," said Gladys. Her eyeballs looked quite odd.

"You tried it?" I asked.

"Of course, darling," she trilled. Now I could see what it was about her eyeballs—they were bulging and receding, undulating gently. "I knew if it was Mr. Myshkin's favorite drink, it must be wonderful, and it is, darling. Darling, I've known all along I was mixed up with a bunch of geniuses!"

Down the hall I heard the door open. I looked and saw Siegman coming in, then a moment later, Harriet came out, spoke to him, and Siegman said something and went out again. Then Harriet came down the hall, carrying the newspapers Siegman had brought back.

"Success?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "The bartender says it may be days before he can move under his own power. Al went down to get him."

"How far from here is he?"

"Third Avenue—not far."

Gladys stuck her head out of the kitchen and peered at us.

"Darling, what is Mr. Myshkin doing on Third Avenue?"

"He's in a hock shop," I said.

"On Sunday night, darling?"

"It's an emergency hock shop," I said. "Open day and night."

"Hock, hock, the lark!" said Gladys.

"Congratulations, Henry, darling," said Harriet.

The three of us went into the living room, Gladys refusing help as she carried the champagne bucket. Harriet took a look at Gladys' eyeballs and was about to say something. "It's nothing," I said. "All it does is enable the eyes to see through—is this dress of yours wool?"

"It is," said Harriet.

"Wool," I said.

"You mean woof!" she said.

"I mean I never really appreciated your figure before this."

"Really, Henry, darling," Harriet murmured.

I popped my eyes at her, plumped down into a chair and took the newspapers Siegman had brought back. Then I popped my eyes again. The way things had been happening that day, I'd practically forgotten the robbery, but the papers were full of it. The cops had given us an idea of the magnitude of the crime, but here in cold print it was really staggering.

"MOB KILLS TWO IN 3½ MILLION WATERFRONT ROBBERY!"

"HARBOR GUNFIGHT LEAVES 2 DEAD, GOLD MILLIONS MISSING!"

One of the papers had a last minute bulletin on the front page adding that a third guard, previously reported among the four wounded, had died since. The other three were still in critical condition—the nature of the weapons used by the robbers, sub-machine guns and shotguns, and the ruthlessness with which all the guards had been mowed down, indicated calculation to leave no survivors—and it added up to the fact that the police had been unable to do much questioning or get more than perfunctory details of the crime. But the newspaper artists had outdone themselves with imaginary pictures of the robbery and maps full of X's marking spots. There were interviews with the D.A., with high police officials, with learned detective story writers and special crime correspondents, and even with the one or two watchmen who knew absolutely nothing except that they had been asleep somewhere in the area. There were also a page of photographs of some very interesting faces, all with

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numbers underneath of known criminals at large who were considered capable of the robbery—which was perhaps the saddest testimonial to how little the police had to work with.

It was a crime to stir the imagination—almost three and a half million dollars worth of solid gold ingots taken off a ship while an armored car and six armed guards stood by—but the last years I'd spent in Europe had been full of stories that made this one pale by comparison. The Army was still tracking down a lot of war loot, there were still vast treasures missing, and now and then when a cache of ten million or so was uncovered, it wasn't considered terribly exciting on the other side.

All it meant to me was that a small and unnecessary and harmful mention of Myshkin had gotten into these stories. The police had nothing to say, and when a watchman could be interviewed, the sidelight of a nut working on a nutty invention in the crime sector was worth a paragraph. A cop—it could be someone like Nulty—had probably milked ten bucks from a reporter for telling him about Myshkin, but later on, long after the crime would be solved and forgotten, those who knew Myshkin would remember that he had been carted off to the psychopathic ward for observation.

I threw the papers down and observed Gladys taking a sip from the bucket, but Harriet was leaning out the window in a pose that was much more fun to watch, and that got me thinking about whether it would do me any good to get her to drink some of the stuff herself. Just as this thought began to wander into an enticing bypath, she turned from the window and gave me a look that convinced me telepathy had arrived.

I was wrong—Siegman and Roscoe Cramwell had arrived—and Harriet had seen them emerging from a cab downstairs. She went to the door and I got ready to grab Gladys at the first sign of panic.

But I was wrong again, because when the door opened and Roscoe Cramwell's voice boomed through the house, all Gladys did was look up at me and remark, "Darling, doesn't that sound like Roscoe?" and take another sip while her long lashes fluttered.

Then Roscoe came in—well, he didn't exactly come in, he was supported in. He had one arm locked around Siegman's neck and the other was being held up by Harriet. His face was as exciting as an Italian sunset, and rather more spectacular. He walked with the gait of a man who had learned that sidewalks are often a compound of jelly, and that floors are given to unpredictable swinging and swaying. His handsome spade beard was gathered halfway up and tied with a blue ribbon from which hung an enameled badge with the words: *First Prize, Doberman Pinscher Section.* Some time earlier that day he had been impeccably dressed for a funeral, with striped trousers, grey vest and frock coat, but he was now a large mass of tastefully sprinkled sawdust flakes and streaks of dry beer foam. If he had worn a hat, it was missing, and so were his shoes—and so, for that matter, were his socks. He was an arresting personage, you might say.

Most of his motor functions had long since ceased to operate, but his vocal chords were in superb fettle. "Where is Gladys?" he boomed. "Lead me to her and let me die! The wizard promised me life until I behold her once again, then soft will my breath depart!"

By then I'd gotten enough of his breath to know that it would take more than a wizard to make it depart. He stared directly at Gladys, but it was impossible for him to focus on anything more than a foot distant. "I know she

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must be here!" he roared. "The atmosphere crackles with the magic of her presence, and all—"

"Alfred, darling," said Gladys, "where is Mr. Myshkin?"

At the sound of her voice, Cramwell bellowed, tore himself loose from Siegman, took two steps and pitched forward full length on the floor with a thud that must have registered on the Fordham seismographs. He rolled over on his back, adjusted the ribbon and its badge, closed his eyes, and huge tears rolled down his glowing countenance. I could have sworn his tears had a head on them.

"Am I dead?" he wept. "Someone phone the wizard and find out."

"Gladys, darling," said Harriet, "you're not going to let him lie there?"

"Pooh," said Gladys, stirring the bucket with a dainty finger.

"How heartless darling," said Harriet.

"Darling, if you only knew what is in my heart," said Gladys softly.

"It's only a matter of hours before he's no longer with us, darling," said Harriet. Isn't that so, Dr. Siegman?"

"Maybe minutes," said Siegman.

"Darling, he should be comforted," said Harriet.

"Nice Roscoe," said Gladys. "Good Roscoe, sweet Roscoe, fine Roscoe."

"Oh, I can't bear to watch this touching scene," said Harriet. "Hold his hand while he breathes his last, darling."

"Goodbye, Roscoe," said Gladys, reaching out to touch his hand.

The next instant she let out a shriek as Cramwell's enormous paw gripped her fingers. "He's crushing me!" she wailed. "Make him let go!"

She kept howling until Siegman came over and stood on Cramwell's chest. He eased his hold a trifle then, but he didn't let go. He just lay there, tears coursing down his cheeks, his chest rising and falling gently, and Siegman standing on his chest moved up and down with him.

"Make him let go," Gladys pleaded. "He once held my hand for thirty-six hours in a rowboat!"

"How well I remember it, darling," Harriet sighed.

"You'll just have to put him to bed," said Siegman, ascending, "and let nature take its course."

"Not with me!" cried Gladys.

"Shame," said Siegman, descending. "I am talking of rigor mortis."

"You're wasting valuable time," said Cramwell, sweetly . . .

Well, we loaded him on a tea caddy and wheeled him into a bedroom. He didn't let go of Gladys, but neither did he molest her. A few minutes later, when I brought in the champagne bucket she'd asked for, she was sitting in a chair beside him, evidently resigned to letting him hold her hand. He seemed asleep but I knew he wasn't. It would be for only a little while, she said, because wasn't Mr. Myshkin coming with Boris and his friend? And she was satisfied that they would know what to do.

So I agreed and left the room and started walking down the corridor to join Harriet and Siegman, and I saw the door to the apartment open slowly and in came Myshkin, in robe and pajamas, without a sound.

"SHHHHH," Myshkin said, putting a finger to his lips. He took his key out of the lock, then reached out into the hallway for a small cardboard package that weighed him down surprisingly, closed the door and met me at the entrance to the living room.

How strange it was, the quiet way both Siegman and Harriet received him—and how understandable. Siegman was engrossed in the newspapers when he happened to glance up and see us. All he did was put the paper down. A moment later, Harriet turned to Siegman, prob-

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ably to address a remark, and followed his gaze. When she saw us, she closed her eyes, then opened them again and said nothing. I understood their reaction because I shared it. It was as if we had known all along that in one way or another we were inextricably bound up with Myshkin. The silence with which we greeted him was our admission of hopelessness, our acquiescence to fate.

But the flame in Myshkin's eyes was fiercer than ever. It had been bigger, maybe, and wilder, but this was something else . . . like the difference between a bonfire and flame jetting under pressure, purposeful, enormously intense, well controlled.

"Is Gladys still here?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," I said.

That was all he wanted to hear. He walked into the living room ahead of me with springy steps and sat down on the piano bench. When he put his cardboard package on the rug, it sank deep into the nap, as if it was concrete. Gladys had left half a glassful of the Creation on an end table near him; he seized it and let it slide down his gullet with greedy ease. Then he ran his tongue around the inside of his mouth, scrutinized the empty glass, set it down reluctantly and made a slight movement with his shoulders, like a man in from a blizzard feeling the welcome of a fireside. When he opened his robe we could see that his pajamas were almost completely covered with yellow splotches—not the fine powdery spray that had been on Harriet's coat, but large areas that seemed to have soaked through the fabric and stiffened as it dried. In the small breast pocket of his pajamas there was a pair of green spectacles.

"I don't suppose any of you thought to bring along that test tube?"

"No," I said.

"That's par for the course," he said. "One yes and one no."

"How did you get in here?" said Harriet.

"I have a key," said Myshkin. "Forgive me, Miss Hopper, I've had it all along. I never used it before, on my word." No one said anything, and after a pause he said, "I wish we had that test tube. Not that—"

"Is Boris really with you?" said Siegman.

"Do you see him?" said Myshkin.

"No," said Siegman. "Is he in that box at your feet?"

"What a happy thought," said Myshkin, almost smiling. "No, Doctor."

"Didn't you tell Gladys you were expecting him?"

"That was downtown, at my place," said Myshkin. "If Gladys had come, I would have let Boris track me there. Alone, I wouldn't dare. That green compound in the test tube may work—I have a very good feeling, in fact, that it will—but when it comes to taking chances at this stage of the game, no. For me, so far, the best answer is Gladys. By the way, where is she?"

"Resting in the bedroom," I said.

"Excellent," said Myshkin. "I want her at full strength."

"Then you were keeping us at your place because of Gladys?" I asked.

"It was not obvious?" said Myshkin.

"And not the test tube with the compound?" I went on.

"Henry, my friend, I answered that question."

"Answer it again."

"The compound, yes. But first this magnificent specimen of womanhood, Miss Gladys De Winter."

"Why her?"

"Ah, if I only knew," Myshkin sighed, and this time he did smile. "Not that I don't have what I consider an extremely exciting conjecture. Give me a cigarette, please." He lit and talked with

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smoke pouring out of his smile. "You know, sooner or later, in all scientific inquiries, when one goes far enough, the final result is always the same—the big question, the staggering question, the question that humbles us all, the question that drives us to laboratories, or to drink, or to church—the question that unites us with bedbugs and bacteria, with sunlight and seaweed. Even to ask it requires the presumption of an idiot, but of course, since we are all idiots in the face of this question, we ask it as casually as we ask the time of day . . ."

". . . And this question?" I said.

"What is life?" said Myshkin.

"A good question," said Siegman. "You have an answer, perhaps?"

"What is life?" Myshkin repeated, paying not the slightest attention to Siegman. "This question occurred to the first man who looked up at the sky and was capable of an uneasy suspicion of infinity. Ages later, when he had learned to make lenses, the suspicion began to be documented. If he turned the lens around, almost in avoidance of his big question, and searched down within his world, the result was the same. It is still the same. The telescope and the microscope keep trying to find a boundary, but they only push it farther away. The next telescope will discover another *beyond,* and so will the next microscope. The telescope will find ever extending universes, suns beyond the suns beyond the suns. The microscope will find— What has it found?" Chromosomes? And beyond? Genes. And beyond? But they have broken the genes into parts, and those parts into parts. Still the answer is the same. But this is not to say that nothing is learned. There is a big thing to be learned—the bigness of this question. If that alone is learned, already man knows as much as he will ever know. But there are also small things to be learned—small, practical things, though they may be of great value to us in the living of our lives. We can never know the essences, but paradoxically, we can use them. Some day man will go a million times further into the nature of a bacterium, and discover that he can go still ten million times further. But meanwhile he will have helped someone's cold, or dandruff, or teeth. The path of his progress will be marked by his destruction of plagues and pestilences, but the path will go on and on."

And he smoked with great relish. I don't deny it was impressive, and in more than one way. It was not only what he was saying, but the ease and the relaxation in his manner, and the queer thing about it was that instead of contradicting, it complemented the intense, controlled ferocity that I had felt in him when he first came into the room. He was not only a far different Myshkin from the one I had met on my homecoming, but quite different Myshkin from the one I had left at home a few years ago.

"And this," Myshkin went on after a pause, "is by way of answering your question, Henry, and I do not feel particularly that I am coming from the sublime. Why Gladys De Winter? I don't know. But I have a great suspicion that she has an essence that is very rarely found in such purity in nature. And, as I have said, one does not have to know essence to be able to use it. My feeling is that Gladys represents something that is amazingly, magnificently, mysteriously, overwhelmingly useful to me—and to all of us, since we are together in this fantastic sweep of events."

"I wish I could feel that I understood," I said.

"You'll understand it when you see it."

"But will I see it?"

"I think so," said Myshkin. "I can

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almost make it a promise." He moved his shoulders again. "You know, that was quite a drink I had here. What was it? The strangest flavor . . ."

"I made it expressly for Gladys," I said, "but if I had to do it—"

Just then Gladys' voice floated out of the bedroom, down the corridor and in to us. "Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings . . ." It was a miracle of timing, and Myshkin's face creased with a warm, joyous smile.

"How pure, how pure," he murmured. "Henry, I could kiss you."

"She's back in her manic cycle," said Siegman. "Maybe she broke loose?"

Myshkin stiffened. "What do you mean broke loose? What's this?"

"I'll see," said Harriet, leaving the room.

"Don't get excited," I said, and I told him briefly what we'd done.

But Myshkin was on his feet halfway through it. "Don't you understand?" he said. "She must be free and close at hand! The bedroom is perfect, but she must be free! I'll saw that actor's arm off if I have to! Miss Hopper," he said to Harriet as she came back, "what's going on in there?"

"It's all right," she said, sitting down wearily "She's been giving him that drink and he let go of her. Now he's putting on my best robe and she's going to pack a bath towel with ice cubes for his head. Henry, I don't know what you put in the champagne bucket, but be a darling and bring me some of it."

"I'll go," said Myshkin.

"You stay put," I told him. "This is fine—you're happy because she's free, and we're free because she's happy. I'll let her know you're here and I'll even tell her that Boris and his playmate are coming. Anything for more of this peace and quiet."

But going down the corridor it occurred to me that Myshkin hadn't really made clear his expectations concerning Boris, let alone the gunman. He'd said he would have let Boris track him to his place if Gladys had come there—but he had an equivalent set-up now—so if Boris was following him, why not here? But that wasn't the only question Myshkin had avoided. Even at his mellowest and most loquacious, his conversations were like a bee's flight in a field of clover—he took a little honey here, touched there, moving fast and not nearly as erratically as one might think, and if you tried to examine him a little more closely, you had a good chance of winding up stung.

Gladys was in the kitchen, emptying the ice trays in a folded bath towel. I took a few cubes and glasses and told her about Myshkin. She asked about Boris and his darling friend before I could get to it, and I said that was all right too, they were on their way. She told me all about the lark again and we went into the bedroom. There was Cramwell sitting propped up with pillows against the headboard. He was still drunk enough to disgrace a Bowery gutter, but would you believe it?—that Creation of mine had actually improved him a little. He was wearing a lovely flowing blue silk gown, with a high Chinese collar that made his chins stand up and had the beard, ribbon and all, jutting out at a forty-five degree angle. The gown was covered with beautifully embroidered stars and ringed planets, and when Gladys finished winding the bath towel around his head, turban fashion, he looked like a high class swami that someone had had stuffed and taken home to keep in the Trophy Room.

"How do you feel?" I said.

"Wizard, just wizard," he said. When he enunciated the *z's* he grinned from ear to ear. "Don't empty that bucket, boy."

When I got back to the living room,

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Myshkin and Siegman were sharing the couch, with the newspaper accounts of the robbery between them, jabbering away like old fraternity brothers at a twenty years' reunion. Harriet was listening to them with the interested frown I'd seen appear when discussion grew too recondite for her to follow. I knew very well what they were talking about. It surprised me.

I delivered Harriet's drink, but even my anticipation for the experiment didn't keep me from joining them.

They were looking over the page of photographs of criminals who had been tagged as worthy of consideration in a job of such magnitude and murderous skill, and Myshkin was nodding and working his eyebrows up and down to manifest admiration.

"A fine conclusion, my dear Doctor," said Myshkin, 'but how did you come to it? Surely not just because Boris used one or two medical terms?"

"Naturally, the medical terms struck me immediately," said Siegman, "but that was only the beginning. They were part of a whole outburst filled with archaic and obscure words like popinjay, and administering a bastinado. They poured out of him almost involuntarily. Obviously he'd been reading medical tracts and who knows what else, but it was astonishing the way words seemed to stick to him."

"Very discerning," said Myshkin.

"Then take the note he left Gladys on the back of the blueprint," said Siegman. "First, the repetition of *darling* all through it—after just a few minutes of Gladys' being with him. That influence seemed unmistakable. But if it was so clear a derivation, what about his use of words like *characters* and *ice?* All right, *characters* may be fairly general, but when it appeared with a rather professional underworld word like *ice,* it was worth thinking about."

"I agree," Myshkin nodded. "Absolutely."

"Well, then Boris showed up with his gunman. As far as tracing the evolution of his vocabulary went, that fitted perfectly. But it raised the much more perplexing question: where did Boris get him?"

"Now I see," said Myshkin. "This coincidental factor of the robbery so close to my home, and the additional fillip of the criminals disappearing right in the neighborhood—that's what made you curious to check these photographs in the newspaper?"

"Yes."

"You thought there might be a connection between Boris' gunman and the vanished rooks?"

"Yes."

"But now that you've looked through this rogue's gall[illegible] finding a one who resembles Boris' gunman, you're at an impasse?"

"Not necessarily," said Siegman. "The gallery is only guesswork. What if the actual criminals were a small-time gang, and this is their first big splash? There could be lenty of other reasons. It would be ridiculous to assume the gang can only be made up from among these men."

"Did I say so?" said Myshkin. "I'm only trying to see what you think." He picked up the drink I'd brought him and sipped it with murmurs of approval.

"How does it hit you?" said Siegman.

"The drink, or what you said?" asked Myshkin. "The drink is splendid."

"You don't think there's anything in what I said?" said Siegman.

"I consider it," said Myshkin. "an altogether praiseworthy display of ratiocinative talent, but how did you ever get past the question you call 'perplexing,' and which I find completely stultifying—*where did Boris get a gunman?* In-

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stead of examining it with a little perspective. you're off involving Boris with gangsters. That's about as intelligent as Nulty's profound suspicions that *I'm* mixed up in the robbery."

"What do you know about Nulty's suspicions?" I broke in.

"Please. Henry, one at a time," said Myshkin. "It's no mystery."

"What do you mean by perspective?" said Siegman.

"Simply that you're forgetting our own very special position—I might say predicament. We know about Boris; I made him; you've grown accustomed to him and to the idea of him; for us he's real. But how could he—*after all, he's a one-foot tall chicken-man!*—how could he possibly get together with *any* outside people, let alone a killer presumably from a gang being hunted by regiments of police, and get him to act as his henchman?"

At this Siegman turned to me with a badly puzzled look and got one just like it in return. "Just a minute, Myshkin," he said. "Whether or not Boris' henchman has anything to do with this gang, he nevertheless *is Boris'* Henchman, isn't he? So obviously he did get together with at least one person, right?"

"Wrong," said Myshkin.

"Wrong?" said Siegman.

"Wrong," said Myshkin. "The way to tackle this problem is to begin with the premise that Boris' getting together with outside people is just about impossible. It does violence to credibility. Try to figure out a circumstance, or a set of circumstances, that could account for such a thing."

"Are you serious?" I said.

"Of course," said Myshkin impatiently. "I'm trying to show you what this gunman business really is, but if you won't think clearly—"

"But we saw Boris together with his henchman," I said.

"Don't be confused by what you saw" said Myshkin.

"I won't." I said. "Not even by what you say. And what's more, not even by what I didn't see."

"Please, Henry, you're a terrible bore when you speak this way."

"I apologize. I've been brought up to think the old muddled way—when I see something that's hard to explain, I look for an explanation instead of telling myself I didn't see it. I think more now of Siegman's ideas about the importance of Boris' vocabulary than I did at first—"

"Will you listen to me?" Myshkin interrupted.

"As soon as I've told you what I want to hear," I said. "Now, the first time I saw Boris, he told me he was looking for an ally. He thought maybe I'd do, but I turned out a disappointment. So that even if we hadn't seen Boris' gunman, and established beyond any doubt that he has gotten together with someone on the outside, the idea itself would still not be impossible to accept, though it might be more difficult. Well, we know it's so. The question is *how?* And I think the answer is tied up with the strange way you managed to escape from the hospital. I'm sold on the invisibility angle."

"How sickening," said Myshkin, turning to his drink.

"It was your idea originally," I said.

"But I didn't actually mean I believed in invisibility!" said Myshkin. "It was just my way of saying it was so mysterious I couldn't even propose an alternative explanation. However, I know there must be one—"

"I know," I said. "It was a good theory as long as it didn't mean anything to us. Now that I can back it up, document it—"

"Nonsense," said Myshkin flatly. "Henry, you're wasting—"

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"So you see," I went on, "if what I say is true, it goes a long way toward explaining the arrangement between Boris and his henchmen. If we could get used to the idea, so could others—and if Boris' research had provided—"

"Boris' research?"

"I'm not saying it has to be his idea alone," I went on. "I'm not at all sure you weren't working on something like this yourself. Maybe you got it from the notes on the walls—anyway, I do know that you're well aware of invisibility as a factor in this case, and I can back it up."

"Enough," said Myshkin. "Let's hear it."

"First," I said, "I know you were in the downstairs room all the time I was there with Nulty."

"I was?" said Myshkin.

"Otherwise you couldn't possibly have known a thing about Nulty's theory. He didn't mention it the first time until after you'd been taken away. The only other time he spoke about it was downstairs after you'd supposedly flown the coop—if a word like coop is permissible under the circumstances."

"Henry, you're wrong," said Myshkin. "I was up on the roof—I heard it all through the chimney. I took it for granted you knew the chimney was how I'd escaped. I don't see why you should find this so unacceptable an idea."

"That brings up reason number two," I said. "Your clothes moved when no one was supposedly in that room."

"I beg your pardon?" said Myshkin.

"You wouldn't want me to believe the clothes had moved by themselves, would you?" I said.

Myshkin looked at me intently. "Henry, you're not fooling? On my word, this is of utmost importance."

"I guessed as much myself," I said.

"Not the way you mean it!" Myshkin snapped. "Now tell me about those clothes, or you won't get another word out of me! Where did you find them?"

"Just where you left them," I said. "Near the pile of boxes against the wall."

"That's not where I left them," said Myshkin quietly.

I gave him a big friendly grin. "I see what you're after," I said.

"Please go on," said Myshkin. "I won't interrupt again."

"The clothes were in plain view when Nulty and I came in," I said. "He kicked the bundle aside during his search. I couldn't believe he hadn't recognized them, but I couldn't say anything either. When I went out with Nulty and came back alone a moment later, I noticed the clothes had moved again. That told me there was something in the room worth thinking about."

Myshkin nodded. "You're right, Henry," he said softly, and he picked up his drink and drained it. But you refused to make it logical for yourself Do you really think I'd leave the clothes lying around where anyone could see them? Do you think I didn't consider the strong possibility of Nulty's coming downstairs? Believe me, Henry, I took no chances. The instant I got down there, I stuffed the bundle into a carton, turned the carton upside down, piled some others on it, and half a minute later I was working my way up the chimney. When I got up on the roof, I could see the cops outside in front of the house. If they hadn't been there maybe I'd have beat it immediately—as it was, I listened in on what was happening. I knew Nulty was a ridiculous figure the first time I saw him, so your conversation didn't really interest me much But when you all went out and Nulty waited below for you, I congratulated myself—because if the cops lay their hands on me again there'll be no escape next time . . . no Boris to work a wonder. Boris got me out once, but that was part of a

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trap," Myshkin concluded. "I sensed it all along. What you've told me now confirms it."

"What about the clothes?" I said.

"That's it," said Myshkin. "They were the trap."

"Well, of course," said Siegman, "I wouldn't want to be caught dead in your clothes, but that isn't what you mean, is it?"

Myshkin looked at him, at me, finally at Harriet, but for a moment he said nothing. I would have given a lot for a look inside that wild head of his. "You say you went back to the room again without Nulty?" he asked me. "Why was that?"

"I wanted to tell you we'd be here."

"And where was Nulty?"

"I locked him out. I took him to the door, closed it and went back."

Myshkin nodded. "And saw that the clothes had moved again," he sighed.

"How calmly you say that," I said.

"Why not?" said Myshkin. "We're almost at the end of it. With a little luck, before tonight's over . . ." He let it land there. "Didn't Nulty recognize my clothes?" he asked.

"He was biding his time," I said, "hoping to catch me—and maybe you, too. It didn't do him much good. I just felt foolish."

"You mean Nulty followed you back in a *second* time? Please, Henry, save your impatience for women! First you tell me you locked him out! Now you say he followed you in!"

"He had a key," I said. "I didn't know about it."

"A key to *my* place?"

"Yes, he returned it to me—said he'd found it outside the door in the yellow dust."

"May I see it?"

I gave it to him.

"Poor Boris," he murmured. "This key has been missing ever since the rebellion started. It must have meant a lot to him—the open sesame when the proper time arrived—and then to have his first grand attempt blow up in his silly little face! How sure he was of himself. You know, Henry, sometimes I feel almost affection for him. I'd have kept him as a pet if he hadn't turned out such a monster." Myshkin sat there chuckling good naturedly.

"Do you know I love these conversations with you?" I said. "Not that the conversation itself is enjoyable. The kick comes later when I trace all your devious bypaths and tunnels—"

"Tunnels?" said Myshkin. "What a strange way to put it."

"—And interruptions," I went on. "The walrus and the carpenter would have loved you. They'd only have had to ask you a question you didn't care to answer, and automatically that would be the time for you to talk of many things—not only sealing wax and cabbages, but newspaper photographs, detectives, missing keys, monstrous pets—and when things got dull, a long scholarly dissertation on the interior meaningless of meaninglessness. Nevertheless I'll try once more."

Siegman got up. "I don't know which of you makes me more sick," he said, "but I know the cure. Call me in the morning and let me know who won."

"A pox upon your pointed head," said Myshkin tenderly.

"I was counting on sleeping at your place tonight, Al," I said.

"What's wrong with my place?" said Myshkin.

"Your place is Grand Central Station," I said. "By the way, Nulty probably has a duplicate of this key."

"Come over when you're ready," said Siegman, and Harriet rose to accompany him to the door.

"That's absolutely against the law!" said Myshkin.

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"Why don't you go down to Police Headquarters and complain?" I said. "By the way, not that I mean to harass you with my foolish fancies about invisibility—you'll notice I haven't pursued the question of how clothes could move by themselves—but how do you find it so easy to run around the city in a pair of pajamas and a hospital robe? Don't you attract any attention? Or doesn't anyone ever see you?"

Myshkin looked at me pityingly. "Downtown I had no trouble," he said. "Uptown I've been using a cab. He's still downstairs waiting. Take a look from the window."

"You say that as if you feel sorry for me," I said.

"I do," said Myshkin. "I'm dead broke. You'll have to pay him."

"Thanks," I said. "How big a bill did you figure on running up before you told me about it?"

It didn't seem to me there was anything in my remark to warrant the look that came over his face. He had risen from the couch, jabbing the air with a pointed finger. I turned around.

Harriet had backed into the room. A step behind her came Siegman, retreating slowly, with his hands raised. Beyond him, as they followed, I could see the heads and shoulders of two men. Then Harriet and Siegman moved apart, disclosing between Siegman and the two men—our own daring and intrepid Boris!

He was dressed just as we had seen him before, except that under his checkered cap there were huge green goggles that obscured half his face. The men with him resembled his previous companions only in that they seemed fully as sinister and prepared to do Boris' bidding. One of them had a sawed-off shotgun resting in the crook of his arm, the other cradled a sub-machine gun. The one with the shotgun wore a brown suede windbreaker and army trousers, while the gent with the sub-machine gun was nattily attired in the customary pearl gray Fedora, matching gloves, and pinstripe suit. One thing all, including Boris had in common—spots and stains of green and orange in several places on their clothes. It made me think of the colored lights that had shone through the towels in Myshkin's place. The green stains were the color of oxidized copper one sees on old installations; the orange was quite apparently rust.

"Long time no see," said Boris.

"Long time no look, Big Chief Gum Drop," Myshkin laughed. "Is not my fault if Chief no able to follow tracks plain as nose on face! How do you like that, Henry?" Myshkin howled. "Now he's an Indian!"

Siegman turned and said in a quavering voice, "For God's sake, Myshkin, control yourself!"

But Myshkin was having another spasm. "Look at Boris! Is not him extremely paleface?"

"Screamingly funny," said Boris, trying to keep the squeak out of his voice. "A man could die laughing from a joke like that."

"Oh," said Myshkin, disappointed. "What happened to the Indian? I thought it was really an inspiration—" he leaned forward and regarded Boris with a cruel smile on his face. "—because you were so ideally equipped to supply your own feathers!"

Boris's twelve-inch body shook from head to foot. He opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and used the silent interval to remove his green goggles.

"I don't provoke," he said. His eyeballs were as yellow as those of the two poised brutes behind him. "It was my intention to propose a discussion, with a view toward ironing out our difficulties. However, this last insult has con-

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vinced me that only you need flattening. Understand me now, dear friend and mentor, I do this not for motives of revenge, but wholly from an inner drive for justice that has been too long delayed." In spite of the controlled, measured cadence of his voice, his tiny fists kept relaxing and clenching, revealing now and then a flash of something silvery clasped in each little palm. "You were so fortunate as to escape execution last time—"

"But you still don't know how, do you?" Myshkin smiled.

"It doesn't matter—"

"Believe me, it does matter," said Myshkin. "You know, I wanted to have this out with you on a man-to-chicken-man basis—you coming without your hired killers, while I would pledge not to use fowl play," and he spelled it so Boris wouldn't miss it.

"Enough of this!" Boris shrieked.

"It was a poultry trick! I admit it!" Myshkin screamed with joy. At the top of his voice he called, "Gladys! Gladys, come in here at once!"

Boris whirled and moved aside. The two gunmen brought their weapons up.

Gladys came dancing into the room, her eyes bright with excitement.

"Oh!" she squealed. "It's darling little *Boris!* Mr. Myshkin, darling, you're a darling!" Then she looked at the two goons and cried, "But where's the other one—the dangerous, romantic one?"

"Jezebel!" Boris shrieked. "Get out of here!"

"See what I mean?" Myshkin howled.

"Darling, not that these are bad," said Gladys, fluttering her lashes.

But while they were shouting back and forth at each other, the most extraordinary thing was happening. From the instant Gladys had entered the room, the two gunmen seemed almost turned to stone, but when she spoke their legs trembled, their arms moved compulsively, and suddenly they both flung aside their guns and brought their arms up.

"Circe! Mata Hari!" Boris cried.

But it was too late.

Now that I saw it happening again, I understood what had taken place at Myshkin's house. This time, too, Boris seemed to be locked in struggle with his hirelings. His eyes were bulging and tiny veins showed all over his face. His hands gripped the silver objects in them with all the strength he could muster. It wasn't enough. In spite of all he could do to prevent them—which Boris was obviously trying to do—the two gunmen brought their out-stretched arms down to their sides, then up again, repeating the motion over and over . . . until it became evident that what they were doing was flapping their wings.

Furthermore, all possible doubt that this is what was happening was immediately dispelled as the gangsters stretched their necks, tilted their chins upward, rolled their eyes glassily toward heaven, and crowed.

It was, frankly, crowing of a superior sort, not only equalling Boris' earlier effort in passion and artistry, but far outdoing him in volume. The walls shook, the windowpanes rattled, small objects everywhere in the room trembled. If this sight alone had not been enough to do it, the physical impact of sound had everyone rooted to the spot. Even Myshkin was incapable of motion, and this alone explains Boris' subsequent ability to escape.

Escape he did—but not before he rushed up between his hirelings, got up on tiptoe, adjusted his little head to the proper angle and contributed a thrilling vibrato. The trio that would have had the customers at the Metropolitan showering flowers from the balcony.

It was a moment such as comes to few people, but I would have passed up mine. The one thing that made it

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worth while at all was its effect on Gladys, the recipient of this grotesque serenade. She uttered a single faint gasp of ecstasy and swooned away. Siegman caught her as she fell, with a facility that indicated he was developing skill at it.

This fraction of a second's diversion was all Boris and his two henchmen needed. Suddenly they came out of it, wheeled, and rushed from the room. When Myshkin attempted to follow, he crashed into Siegman and Gladys, and the three of them crashed to the floor. Myshkin bounced up, then got down on his hands and knees, searching for the green goggles, that had slid out of his pocket, then finding them he cried, "Yoicks! After them!" He went tearing down the corridor.

Well, I did the only thing that made any sense to me at the time. I helped pick up Siegman and Gladys.

As I did so, in rushed Roscoe Cramwell with the champagne bucket. He took one look, sized up the situation—oversized it, of course, which was natural not only for his bulk but for his condition—and slung the bucket at my head. "A fine pair of gentlemen!" he roared. "I know she's obstinate but there are some things about which a girl must be allowed to make up her own mind!"

Well, he had missed me with the bucket, but it took Siegman and me a good two minutes to get past him and out into the hall.

Of course, there was no sight of Myshkin or Boris or the gunmen by then—but there was another that froze us in our tracks—Siegman for one reason, me for two. There on the landing, sitting as I had seen him the first time, was Suddsy.

"They shot me," he moaned.

I could see he hadn't been shot, but poor Suddsy was in a terrible state. His derby lay crushed at his feet, his neatly combed hair was badly ruffled and his ordinarily watery eyes were brimming blank pools. As I said, he might have shocked me because of my experience with him, but he affected Siegman for quite another reason, for Suddsy was neatly sprayed with fine areas of yellow powder.

"Two shots," Suddsy moaned. "Right in the gut. Goodbye, brother."

"You're not shot." I said. "What happened? Did you see Myshkin?"

"Myshkin," Suddsy said. "Brother, he'll get the chair for this. He killed me. I'll testify to it!"

"Henry, who is this guy?" Siegman cried.

"I told you about him," I said. "He's the guy with the wagonload of stiffs."

"I'll say, brother," said Suddsy. "Just put me in the back with them and get another driver.",

"Suddsy, listen to me," I said. "It's very important. Did you see Myshkin?"

"I saw him, all right," said Suddsy. "Also, I saw those guys who came up here to visit him, and I know who they are." He blinked his eyes at me the way as I remembered he had when I'd been discussing money with him. It was his way of looking formidable.

"Do you know them by name?" said Siegman.

For a dead man, Suddsy managed to look very sly. "Brother, I mean to say I do," he said.

"You'd better talk," said Siegman. "Silence may involve you in conspiracy!"

Suddsy managed a weak grimace. "Call the cops," he said. "Outside of them I ain't talking to anyone. I know some interesting people downtown that would be very anxious to hear what I got to say. Brother, I'll put it to you plain—you're lookin' at a man who can't be bought. Not for peanuts. No, sir! I

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know how big this deal is."

"A hundred bucks," I said.

Suddsy looked at me incredulously. He picked up his crushed hat, grimly studied its condition, then regarded the yellow spray on his clothes and shook his head. "Somebody has got to pay for this," he muttered. "Why should anyone go around exploding mustard bombs? What am I, a ham or something?"

"Five hundred dollars," I said.

"Suddsy's expression indicated he was beyond any thoughts of haggling. "You got ten grand?" he asked casually.

"You're crazy," said Siegman. "You're suffering from shock."

"Brother," said Suddsy, "I ain't going to be the only victim of shock before this night's over. I mean to say that feller Myshkin has finally got me good and mad. Out of my way!"

He brushed by us, majestically ignoring the elevator, and stalked down the stairs.

"What do you think it means?" I asked Siegman.

He looked at me as if I was responsible for what was happening. "It means I was one hundred per cent correct," he said bitterly. He rang the elevator bell.

"You're not going to leave now?" I said.

"No such thought," said Siegman. "Especially now that I'm finally convinced there's no real danger."

When the elevator came up the boy immediately and anxiously asked what was going on. "Who's the fat little guy sitting downstairs in the lobby? He's got a crushed derby and crushed turnipso all over his clothes, you know? He keeps asking me where is it. Where is what? I want to know. He walked down but he must have come from here. Nobody else in this house has that kind of people visiting them."

"Will you shut up a minute?" said Siegman.

"Sure," said the boy. "Just go down and tell that little guy where it is, whatever it is."

"Did you see Mr. Myshkin leave?" asked Siegman.

"He doesn't know Myshkin by name," I said.

"I don't have to know anybody by name around here," said the boy. "I catalogue them by the way they leave this house. You probably mean that eccentric millionaire, don't you? Well, he walked down, too, only—"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Siegman broke in. "Where did this eccentric millionaire get into it?"

"The wild guy," said the boy. "He's been here before. He always dresses sloppy, but this is the first time I ever seen him running around in pajamas."

"Where did you get the idea he's a millionaire?" said Siegman.

"Let me finish," said the boy. "Like I say, I was talking to the cab driver."

"What cab driver?"

"The one that was waiting for him all the time he was upstairs," said the boy. "If you ask me he's far from his right mind himself. Imagine lettin' a guy run up a bill over eleven bucks—millionaire or no millionaire. Because without security, what happens?"

"I'm sure you'll tell us," said Siegman,

"Sure I will," said the boy. "I'm in the lobby talkin' to the cabby when this guy—what did you say his name was, Myshkin?—well, he comes jumping down the stairs, yelling, 'After him!' Out he rushes into the street. The next minute he's tearin' down the block, and there's the cabby standin' like he was turned to stone. When he finally does take off after this millionaire that's trying to beat him out of a fare, he's got to turn his cab around and go the wrong way down a one-way street. I don't know what happened after that. How do you like it?"

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"I hate to encourage you," said Siegman, "but haven't you left out a little something—a little something like two or three people who ran out just before Myshkin?"

"Them I didn't see," said the boy, "and I'm not sorry."

"How long had you been in the lobby before Myshkin came down?" said Siegman.

"A few minutes," said the boy. "Like I say, I was talking to this cabby—"

"Bah! Quit talking to the cabby!" said Siegman. "Talk to me! If you were in the lobby a few minutes before Myshkin came down, you couldn't have missed the ones who came before him. They weren't that far apart—two minutes at most. Think," said Siegman, "think hard. Two men and maybe a third, a little one—you might say a very *small* man—"

"How small?" said the boy.

"Never mind," said Siegman wearily. "Are you sure about that few minutes?"

"Sure, I'm sure," said the boy. "'Course, I'm an elevator operator, not a time-keeper."

"Well, anyway you must have seen them come in?" said Siegman.

"Why must I?" said the boy. "Remember me? Elevator operator, not timekeeper, not watchman. Just up and down. I used to think it was monotonous."

"Listen, son," I said, "tell us exactly what you did see from the time Mr. Myshkin arrived."

"He arrived," said the boy. "I took him up. Then I had other calls. None to Miss Hopper's floor. And no two men, and no three men, small ones or otherwise. Then after awhile this cabby comes in. He tells me his story. He's gettin' worried about his eccentric millionaire—wants to know did I take him up, what floor he's on, who he's visiting, things like that. So I explain how it is here. Artistic people, queer ones, I tell him, and that's all right and he feels better. Then he goes out once or twice to get cigarettes, or have a look at the meter, but he keeps coming back and we talk. We're both in the travel business, you might say; he goes one way, I go another, but it's the same—we take people where they want to go."

"Remind me to tell you where to go," said Siegman.

I said, "Just go on, please."

"Oh, I don't mind," said the boy. "Artistic people—I'm used to it. They once brought a goat upstairs. Said they were going to keep him to make their own cheese. Well, I don't know if they made cheese or not, but by the time the Board of Health got around, it sure smelled like it."

"You were talking to the cab driver," I said. "What next?"

"Next comes this little guy," said the boy. "The one that wants to know where is it. One look at him, and I know where to. I take him up here, point to Miss Hopper's door, and I go down. Then I'm in the lobby talkin' with the cabby and nothin' happens until Mr. Myshkin comes down."

"That's all?" I said. "You absolutely didn't hear or see anything else?"

"I did not," said the boy. "But it's funny how life is, ain't it? One minute you're ridin' a guy in the back seat that's so rich he carries a box of gold with him wherever he goes, the next minute you're chasing him down the street to get the money he owes you."

"Yes," I said and looked at Siegman, "life is funny."

Siegman was staring at the boy.

"Gold," I said. "He said Myshkin had a box of gold."

"A cardboard box," the boy said. "You'd think anybody that rich would invest in a nice case—say if it was me, an alligator bag, something like that—"

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But Siegman had already turned and was swiftly walking back into the apartment. I thanked the boy a dollar's worth and followed.

Roscoe and Gladys were loudly audible in the kitchen. Apparently he had clamped down martial law again. In the living room Harriet sat on the floor, examining the contents of the cardboard box Myshkin had forgotten in his precipitate flight.

Siegman was standing over her, looking down into the box. "What made you open it?" he asked.

"Oh," she said, "I just got curious. Mr. Myshkin kept reaching out for it all the time he was here. I wondered about it."

Well, there was plenty left to wonder about it. Inside the box, packed in excelsior and old newspapers were six small statuettes made of solid gold. Of course, there was no immediate certainty they were solid gold, but from what we already knew, and from their weight when Siegman lifted them out and passed them around, there seemed no reason to doubt it. Far more remarkable, however, than their obvious great value was the almost incredible artistic workmanship with which they'd been wrought. They were six perfect little representations of sinister characters; not only features, but every fold and cut of clothes superbly detailed.

It was not trouble at all to recognize three of those little figures. Two of the men they represented had been in this room not long before; and the other had been Boris's companion the first time he had attempted to intimidate Myshkin.

Is it crazy enough for you? But it still didn't end there. Siegman took the statuettes to the couch then picked up the newspapers which he and Myshkin had so recently scrutinized. He studied the rogues' gallery, and with no hesitation chose three pictures. The three statuettes that were strangers to us were also represented by newspaper photos.

"So it's clear enough," said Siegman.

"What's clear enough?" I said. It was impossible to think. Roscoe and Gladys were raising hell in the corridor, with her screaming that she had to go to Tubular Forceps, and Roscoe alternately roaring and pleading that he was completely unequal to a journey of such distance from his ordinary haunts.

Siegman turned to Harriet and said, "You want to stay home, isn't that so? Will you make sure Gladys stays here?"

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Downtown," said Siegman. "Myshkin's in this thing up to his ears. We should have understood that immediately. Maybe then we'd have had some way of understanding Boris, too."

"What do you mean by that?" I said.

"I mean there always had to be a logical explanation. Boris just couldn't be what he seems to be—what Myshkin sold us."

"What are you thinking of?" I said. "You can't be ridiculous enough to be playing with dwarfs, midgets—"

"Or visions or apparitions?" said Siegman. "Or self-induced hallucinations or mass hypnotism? I don't say I know what it is. I do say there must be explanation that can be understood in simple, ordinary, everyday terms, if one knows how to go about it!"

"Wasn't it you who detected a cockscomb in Boris' hair?"

"What of it?" said Siegman. "People in India who think they've seen the rope trick, and who later sign affidavits in groups sometimes numbering hundreds, are known to provide the most precise details of their visual experience. They go into such things as the quality of the fibers that make up the rope itself. If the customary small boy was employed, a spectator may describe minutely a design on some part of his clothes.

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As a matter of fact, such absorption in detail is a pretty good sign that a far more profound absorption has come over the individual."

"You're being defensive," I said. "You're reacting to your bad experience with Boris and hypnotism."

"If anything," said Siegman, "that bad experience could have helped me understand things much sooner. I don't deny it was funny the way it ended, but look at it objectively. I made no pretense of being a great practitioner of the art. This time I was up against someone who knew considerably more about it than I did. In some way he managed not only to reverse it, but quickly and with enormous skill—it was old stuff to Myshkin; I'd stumbled right into his private domain."

"But what about the whole business with the rebellion?"

"All part of his great, grand scheme," said Siegman. "I say I know how deep he is in this robbery because my first and only guess is that he's the ringleader. Nothing else would do for Myshkin."

I picked up the newspaper. "The ringleader of these three guys?" I said. "Nails Nixon, Cokey Harry and Little Maxie?" Among them they had spent sixty years in every jail in North America.

"Yes," said Siegman. "It fits your idea perfectly"

"My idea?"

"It was stupid," said Siegman, "but brought down to earth a little, it's direction was fine. Weren't you looking for some sort of weapon Boris might've been able to offer his theoretical henchmen? Why not Myshkin? Does it make more sense with Boris or with Myshkin?"

"The invisibility?" I said.

"Whatever it turns out to be," said Siegman. "It's all part of the same thing. If you can make people see something that really isn't there, you can make them believe they *aren't* seeing something that really *is*. I'll go further—I'll say the yellow powder is probably it. Maybe it releases a gas of some sort—a new hypnotic agent that makes all his trickery possible."

"What about the machine?" I said.

"A wire store-window dummy for a fat men's shop," said Siegman acidly.

"And the colored lights on the wheel?" I said.

"Where can you find a more perfect description of the hypnotist's method? You see, Henry, this way everything adds up." He was adding it up for himself, too, as he spoke. "Somehow Myshkin discovered or compounded this powder. Being the avaricious Myshkin he is, instead of publishing his discovery, he dreamed up a more personal and profitable use. A few months ago, he moved down to the scene of his future operations, dropping silently into a self-imposed isolation that was broken only for an occasional trip here. Probably by then he had already made contact with the men he wanted. All he'd need would be Nails Nixon himself—at least two of the others are known members of his gang—and it wouldn't be too difficult to interest someone like Nails in a proposition involving millions in gold. Not if Myshkin can do half of what we've apparently seen him do." Siegman nodded somberly. "It was a sweet set-up, and what happened? You had to come barging in. You had to return on the very week-end he had chosen for his first excursion in crime. I say 'first' because Myshkin is criminally insane. This was just the beginning of a career as an amalgamated Jesse James, Raffles and Jack the Ripper. That makes our course clear, as I see it."

"How do you see it?" I said.

"For reason or reasons unknown to us,

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Myshkin's unable or unwilling to leave his place. We've caught him stalling again and again. That's why he's had to prolong the Boris phantasmagoria. I say it was somehow made necessary by your unexpected arrival and further complicated when you dragged the rest of us into it—certainly he couldn't have foreseen that he'd attract so much police notice. Also, I say we'll find him downtown. When we do, our one objective is to get the formula for Myshkin's gas. If we accomplish that, maybe we'll try capturing Myshkin, and deliver him safely to the police. Remember, however, the important thing is to make sure the secret of Myshkin's immensely potent weapon does not remain in his hands alone."

"I see," I said.

"Are you coming with me?" said Siegman.

"Yes," I said.

"Why do you hesitate? Don't you agree with what I've been saying?"

"Not a word of it, but I'll come."

"Good enough," said Siegman. He turned to Harriet. "Remember about keeping Gladys here."

"I will," she said. She reached out and took my hand in hers. "Henry, be careful."

"Do I get to kiss you now?" I said.

"Not if you want me to let you go after you do," she said.

When we left, Gladys was screaming again in the kitchen. Her voice followed us through the door, into the elevator, and down the shaft to the lobby.

Suddsy was sitting at the bottom of the stairs, gazing at his crushed derby and mumbling to himself.

"He still wants to know where is it," said the elevator boy.

Suddsy looked at us without a sign of recognition in his blue eyes. The daze we'd seen him in upstairs seemed now to have enveloped him completely.

"Hello, Suddsy," I said.

"Hello, brother," he said. "Do you know where it is?"

"No," I said.

"No," Suddsy repeated mournfully. "I must have read about it, but I forgot. Now I don't know where it is. Where is it?"

He was still mumbling busily when we went out and got a cab.

IT was past midnight by the time we reached Force Tube Avenue. Elsewhere in the city the streets were still alive with people and noise; here was darkness, and a silence crystallized by a chill in the air to a sharply defined boundary. Along the piers, moored freighters were gently riding the outgoing tide, their nightlights rocking lazily. The district was largely deserted, but still it seemed to me there were more people about than one would normally expect. Even at that late hour, the waterfront was drawing its quota of curious citizens. A liberal sprinkling of detectives was a safe assumption, but no overt signs of police attention were in evidence. A block from Myshkin's house a squad car drew abreast of us. It kept up until we turned off, then went on without slowing—though Myshkin's house was our only possible destination on that dead-end street.

It hadn't occurred to us how we were going to get into the house, but our first attempt to solve the problem worked. We merely tried the door knob. The door opened, and there was no way of knowing if that meant anything. Maybe I had left it unlocked; maybe Myshkin had come back and left it open; maybe he was inside.

There was nobody inside. Siegman went up while I covered the lower room, and after a moment he came down. "Well?" he said. "Anything new with the clothes?"

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"Uh-huh," I said. "They've moved again." Myshkin's bundle of clothes was now lying close to the covered machine. "A big jump this time," I said.

Siegman looked disgusted. "Well, what's your conclusion? You think maybe Myshkin's in here right now wearing his invisible hat?"

"All I say is that I consider it an unusual phenomenon for a pair of pants to patrol a room."

"You have the makings of a good mystery there," said Siegman. "Call it *The Case of the Traveling Trousers,* or *The Case of the Peripatetic Pants.*"

"Just the same," I said, "I wouldn't mind giving the air a few swishes with a long stick."

Then we went upstairs and tried to figure out which of the many there was the test tube we wanted but since we couldn't be certain that the green compound would be among them even if we took them all, we had a discussion on how long we'd wait for Myshkin. While we were discussing it, Myshkin came in. He must have opened and closed the front door soundlessly, but he made no attempt to conceal his presence when he mounted the stairs, and he spoke to us even before he had entered the room.

"Hello," he said. "It certainly took you two long enough to get here." He seemed quite serene and pleasant, but considerably more tired than when he had left us. "I was hanging around near the sea wall. When I saw light up here, I figured it was you. I'll have to get new tar paper for the window," he concluded sadly. "The light shoots out through holes like a dozen airport beacons."

"You expect to go on living here?" asked Siegman affably.

"Certainly," said Myshkin. "Why not? You got a better place for the money?"

"You're not worried about a little thing like money, are you?" said Siegman.

Myshkin looked at him; his expression turned sour. "So you opened my box," he said. "I remembered it later, and I said to myself, 'They won't open it. A man has a right to expect a little privacy, if not in his home, possibly in his possessions.' But no, not you people."

"Lend me some money," said Siegman. "I'll buy a big book on etiquette. I could buy a lot of books with what you had in that box."

"Don't be stupid," said Myshkin. "That stuff will all have to go back."

"Be sure to include an apology," said Siegman. Myshkin sighed, shrugged, and sat down heavily on the bed.

"Well," he said, "maybe I have delayed the police, but what was I to do? I had to take care of my own interests, didn't I? I couldn't expect them to send out a teletype alarm for my escaped chicken-men, could I?"

"I'm surprised you didn't try," said Siegman.

"Remember," said Myshkin, "I didn't want to interfere with them. They marched right in and bundled me off for observation. As it is, they'll still have me to thank for solving it."

"Oh, I don't know," said Siegman. "I think it's easier to bank gold than gratitude."

"If I could only deposit you somewhere," said Myshkin. "Listen, Henry, speaking of bundling reminds me—did you take a look at my clothes downstairs?"

"I'm going to write a book about them. Siegman gave me two good titles."

"Moved again?"

"Moved again."

Myshkin shook his head. "I'll show what it is about those clothes later. They're very important, but there's no immediate danger—I don't see how they can escape from the room."

"And why not?" said Siegman. "I

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see no reason why those pants can't walk right out the open door, if only the sweater will turn the doorknob. What's to prevent it?"

"Nothing," said Myshkin. "You're right, but the truth probably is that the pants don't want to escape, no matter how the sweater feels about it. Henry, you started out by doing all the talking for everybody, but I must say that you're very quiet lately."

"He's experiencing change of life," said Siegman.

"Myshkin, where's Boris?" I said.

"But you notice, Doctor," said Myshkin, "when he does speak, he really says something. Henry, I have an excellent idea where Boris is. If he doesn't show up here soon, I'm going to find out whether or not I'm correct. I was about to try it when I saw the light here, and I was so pooped I decided I'd better take a short rest. Will someone please give me a cigarette?"

I gave him a cigarette and held the light for him.

"So again you're expecting Boris?" said Siegman. "You seemed to have worked out pretty complicated visiting arrangements. Sometimes he chases you, sometimes you chase him. You'd think a social relationship of that kind would be confined to this house, but I notice when it's time for you to get chased Boris cooperates even to going uptown to Harriet's place."

"Confusing, isn't it?" said Myshkin. "Things move too fast. My dear doctor, we live in a changing world. Where I was once very much afraid of Boris, at this moment I feel almost as if I could have a most salubrious laugh at his expense."

"Of course, at the rate you're going," said Siegman, "you can afford practically anything—or am I to understand this new attitude toward Boris derives from a fortress-like faith in your green compound? Or is it the yellow powder?"

"It's not the powder, it's the compound," said Myshkin. "And it's not *my* compound, it's theirs. Without it I wouldn't be anywhere in radius of an unexpected visit from Boris. Not unless Gladys was close by," he added, smiling mysteriously. "How is that wonderful girl? Did you see what she did for me? Did you see how she saved my hash? I really must look her up when all this is over—what a girl!"

As Myshkin had remarked, I hadn't been doing much talking, at least in his company. It gave me a chance to watch him, to observe the minute changes in his expressive face, and a way of judging the value of what he was saying when the words themselves seemed meaningless. The great change in him when he appeared at Harriet's house—the attitude of tranquil waiting, and confidence in the waiting—had not varied. During his earlier conversation with Siegman, about the newspaper pictures, I'd felt Myshkin had been ready to tell us a great deal more on his own than we'd get with our antagonistic questioning. I knew he would never be decorated for telling the truth; nevertheless, if I added up what I knew and what I believed, the total was close to the sum of those things Myshkin wanted me to know and believe.

"Myshkin," I said, "I gather you feel you're at the end of it."

"It? Or wit?" said Siegman.

"Anyone who doesn't know which end is wit is in a bad way," said Myshkin. "Yes, Henry, we're at the end—the successful end."

"I wonder why I say 'you' and you say 'we'?" I said.

"It's because you seem to feel pretty much left out," said Myshkin. "On the other hand, I, who know how indebted I am for your intercession—your determination to stick your nose in my busi-

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ness—feel intimately connected, and grateful not only for past service rendered, but for an infinitely more valuable service I expect of you in the near future."

"And that is?" I said.

"Backing me up when it becomes necessary. Being my witnesses and my collaborators."

"Did you say collaborators or co-robbers?" said Siegman. "Let's hear about the compound."

"You have a compound fracture of the point of your head," said Myshkin. "Instead of talking to Henry and me as equals, a man of your calibre should be taking notes."

"When the time comes," said Siegman.

I said: "You were saying we're expected to be your witnesses?—you mean with the police?"

Myshkin half-closed his eyes and smiled dreamily. He waved a tired arm. "With the whole world," he said. "With the newspapers, with scientists, investigators—through all the great confusion and turmoil that will follow the publication of my research and discoveries. When this stage—which has been all secrecy—ends, the next one—which will be all publicity—begins. If I were to chart the precise point at which this change will occur, it would be that moment in which I dispose of Boris."

"You still think you can do it?"

"I could have done it almost anytime," said Myshkin. "Unfortunately, I didn't know it until now. Just a few drops of the compound, and in the language of the comic books — POW! BAM! and ZOWIE!—no more Boris."

"What if you're wrong?" I said.

"But I'm not," Myshkin sighed. "I should have guessed it, Henry. The very creation of Boris was based on paradox. Paradox, the relation of opposites, is the key to everything."

"It is?" I said.

"Yes," said Myshkin. "For instance, take the compound. What Boris and his confederates were after—"

"Which confederates?" I said. "The other chicken-men or the gangsters?"

"The chicken-men," said Myshkin, "not that it makes any difference. They got this compound by reversing various formulas of mine based on analyses of the yellow powder. Now, notice how the paradox, having begun with their creation, goes further. I created them—possibly they should have loved me—though I would have been gratified by a friendly neutrality, but what I got was an inherent, incurable hostility. I had analyzed the yellow powder hoping for a clue to something that might stop them from exploding. They took the opposite view—to them the analyses were formulas I was using to destroy them. So they took my notes and began working to turn the formulas against me. From their viewpoint, which was one of pure opposition, anything bad for them contained the possibility — properly turned around—of being bad for me. But, as I told you, they worked under great difficulty, at first hampered by the color of the walls, and later, after I'd realized what green did to them, because I specifically used the color against them."

"And you still don't know why green affected them as it did?" I said.

"Not completely, but I have an idea," said Myshkin. "Our learned medical friend touched on it when he observed that the formula for the compound had chlorophyll as a base. I won't enlarge on it at the moment, except to remark that because of this circumstance, the chicken-men evidently had a theory involving the opposition between plant and animal life. Not that they *are* opposed; actually, as we know, they are complementary, mutually interdepend-

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ent—but these creatures of paradox were fundamentally, intrinsically, unable to comprehend such a concept as balance in the universe."

"No?" I said politely.

"No," said Myshkin. "When they attempted to turn the formula against me—itself a horribly muddled idea—ironically enough, they wound up with the opposite effect. Instead of getting me, they had come up with something absolutely lethal to themselves. Instead of homicide, they ended up with suicide."

"I'll have mine fried," said Siegman.

"Anyhow," said Myshkin, "you saw their defense tonight in the green glasses Boris wore—though offhand, knowing very little about the laws of optics or the properties of Boris' eyes, I cannot understand why a green lens should have a neutralizing effect. You see, another paradox."

"I noticed you wouldn't leave Harriet's apartment without your own green glasses," I said. "What do yours do for you?"

He took his glasses out of a pajama pocket and handed them to me. "Please look," he said. "There's plenty of yellow powder around."

I didn't ask why he mentioned yellow powder; the answer was spectacularly apparent the moment I put his glasses on. Every yellow speck of dust, every minute particle, even those hitherto invisible, was turned into a tiny blazing phosphorescent point of light. I passed the glasses to Siegman. He held them before his own spectacles with casual interest, surprise, then with deliberation, but he returned them to Myshkin without comment.

"You see," Myshkin smiled at me, "they're supremely useful in tracking. As I've discovered since I got them—in fact, only in these past few hours—Boris and the others of his crew leave a very fine trail of specks of yellow powder wherever they go—shedding, you might say. That I have Boris to thank for all this—another instance where one of his plans had an opposite effect. These glasses were delivered to me, as I told you," and Myshkin smiled again very broadly, "at the hospital with instructions to wear them so that I'd be able to see signs, arrows and markings that were otherwise invisible." At this Myshkin finally allowed himself to laugh a little. "I'm sorry, Henry," he said. "I keep thinking about you and your invisibility theory."

"Yes," I said. "I notice you avoided the question by remarking merely that the glasses were delivered to you."

"Absolutely," said Myshkin. "Furthermore, in a very true sense, they were invisibly delivered. But, you know, invisibility is sometimes simply a matter of size. Take Boris. He's very quick and he's cautious. He can get around a good deal without being observed at all. And why? Because most of us never look down where Boris is, except by accident. If he were even smaller, he wouldn't have to be either so swift or so careful to stay unnoticed—or as you call it, invisible. And now I really have to go out. When I come back we'll go downstairs and I'll show you what I mean."

"Mean about what?" I said.

"That bundle of clothes Boris carefully transported here," said Myshkin. "You remember I told you it wasn't where it was supposed to be at the hospital? You know why, don't you? It had moved. On my word, it will have to be carefully deloused."

He rose and walked over to the work table. "It may take a quart of this stuff to do it."

He meant the test tube of green compound which he suddenly pulled out of a rack that held at least twenty like it. To Siegman's profound interest, Myshkin began emptying its contents into

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three small capsules. "You know what I have here in my hand?" he said, as he capped them.

"What?" I said.

"Three minute bombs," said Myshkin. "It's astonishing how volatile the compound is. Smash one of these capsules and instantly you have an invisible cloud of finely suspended particles covering easily one hundred cubic feet. All it takes is one particle to do the trick. Now, listen, Henry, I'm leaving the rest of it here just in case Boris shows up with some friends while I'm out."

Siegman was slowly edging toward Myshkin. I knew he was thinking this was his chance. Here was both the compound and Myshkin, thoroughly available for capture. But before he could move against Myshkin, Siegman had to be sure he had the compound. I stopped him by reaching out for the test tube after which I gave him a look that made it perfectly plain I'd empty the works if he touched Myshkin.

"How many of Boris' friends were you expecting?" said Siegman.

"Well," said Myshkin, watching me play with the test tube but not catching what was going on, "since there were six statuettes, there were probably six original models. We've seen three already. I think this time we'll see the other three."

"It seems to me" said Siegman, "you're much more specific than soothsayers ordinarily are."

"It requires a thorough understanding of Boris' simple imagination," said Myshkin, pocketing his capsules. First he came with one. No good. So, he came with two; obviously that was no good either. The logical progression is three. Furthermore, he has three left." Myshkin started for the door. "Therefore, I expect Boris to show up with three—unless, of course," he added, "he expects Gladys to be here. But frankly I don't think he's equipped to understand that business at all."

Siegman followed him while he kept an eye on me. I began tilting the test-tube. Siegman stopped following.

In the light of what later happened, it was to be greatly regretted that during this interval—while Myshkin was discussing paradoxes, compounds and moving clothes—the distracting influence of Siegman's double-crossing plan prevented most of these tantalizing subjects from being more than lightly touched. Siegman's interest had been in getting the formula, then Myshkin. For him the conversation had merely been a lull in his maneuvering, and he was now to commit a final, and serious injury. For Myshkin mentioned something else that enormously merited fuller discussion and never got it.

It was in response to Siegman's last stalling question: "Equipped to understand what business?"

"My dear Doctor," said Myshkin, "didn't you see him when he crows? Haven't I told you Gladys stands for something?—that she symbolizes a pure and very powerful quality? You must not for a moment forget that Boris is the equivalent of a rooster, and here, of course, we have another flawlessly pure symbol. These two fascinate each other. It is absolutely the meeting of two great natural forces, both profoundly moved and awed by the power of this mutual attraction. But you see, in the end the effect is paradox, because—petrified as he is by the experience—Boris turns and flees."

Myshkin added, "I'll see you later," and down the stairs he leaped two at a time, opened the front door and was gone.

"I suppose we can leave now," said Siegman.

"What makes you think so?" I said.

"Let's not go through it again, Henry,"

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said Siegman. "I said I'd be satisfied if we could get our hands on the compound. Now I think we'd better let the police take over."

I said, "Myshkin said he'd take care of the police."

"Poor Myshkin," said Siegman. "He's crazier than I thought, but there's a mind buried somewhere under his criminal tendencies."

"You know," I said, "I can hardly hope that this comes as a shock to you, but I still disagree with large amounts of what you say."

Siegman's undoubtedly wise rejoiner was lost to posterity because the doorbell rang. For an instant we both were thinking hard, and when Siegman said, "I think I'd better go down and answer it," I knew he had figured it out the way I had. Of all the people who could conceivably be seeking entrance to Myshkin's house at this time of night, the only one who'd be likely to ring the doorbell was Nulty, the detective.

So I followed Siegman, a step behind him, and since we had both logically deduced that Nulty was ringing the bell, it turned out to be the last two people on earth we expected to see—Harriet and Roscoe. Their cab had just completed turning about. As it came by again, the cabbie slowed up to lean out and see what manner of being it might be that opened a door in this part of town, at this time of night, to two such people as Harriet and Roscoe—because Roscoe, drunker than ever, was still wearing Harriet's star-studded robe, as well as the huge, ice-packed bath-towel on his head. He swayed from side to side like a monument responding to the stress of the wind, and from his beard came a deep bass, rumbling series of complaints concerning starvation, famine and worse.

Apparently Roscoe was hungry, but no hungrier than I was for the sight of Harriet. It overwhelmed everything else I felt—surprise, impatience, irritation—and all I said was: "Harriet, come in."

"Thank you, Henry," she said, and stood aside for Roscoe.

He staggered in heavily, clutching his heart, and leaned against a wall puffing like a switch engine. "Food," he groaned, "I needs must have provisions to further my quest. The seven lean years are upon us and the populace marches on the granaries. Hand me the torch, comrade! On to the palace!" At this he shook his head and the ice cubes in the towel rattled violently.

"Better let him sit down," said Harriet. Siegman and I steered Roscoe to the bottom stair where we gently lowered him.

"Thank you, sir," said Roscoe. "Your orders call for a zigzag course. Between ten and twelve knots."

"I'd say he was on his last legs if I hadn't seen him on his last legs before these," said Siegman.

Harriet said, "See if the gold is all right. It's inside the curtain, tied around his middle."

We opened Roscoe's robe and there it was. Siegman untied the curtain and spread it open on the floor. The six gold statuettes were in it intact.

"Harriet, what is this all about?" I said.

"Gladys," said Harriet simply. "She got away from Roscoe. I couldn't stop her. She's heading here, she thinks."

"That's bad," I said.

"Wait," said Harriet. "She's with that man—his name is Suddsy."

"But how—" I began.

"Wait," said Harriet. "The elevator boy wouldn't take me down. Gladys told him we had kidnapped her. When I finally ran down the stairs, I found her with Suddsy, getting ready to go off with him. It seems he'd read this address in the newspapers, but had forgotten it.

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When Gladys said she knew it, they joined forces."

"That's very bad," I said.

"Wait," said Harriet, "she thinks the address here is 200 Tubicle Forks."

"That's better," I said.

"You're not waiting," said Harriet. "The elevator operator went off with them."

"What?" I said, and looked to Siegman.

Siegman shrugged. "I diagnosed him as a type among elevator operators."

"So you see," said Harriet, "it wouldn't be too bad if it were Gladys or Suddsy alone—but if that boy puts together what they know, they may be here any minute."

"That's terrible," I said.

"Wait," said Harriet. "This man Suddsy was saying he knew some very dangerous people who might be interested in a gold hunt. First he was driving downtown and pick them up."

"Oh," I said quietly. "That really isn't very good, is it?"

"No," said Harriet, "and that's why I came. I was afraid to stay at home alone."

"No," I said. "You didn't want me to be here alone."

"How do you know?" she said.

"Because a girl like you isn't afraid," I said.

"What do you know about a girl like me?" she said.

"I know I'm nuts about her," I said, and after I'd kissed her I said, "I now pronounce it reciprocal."

"More, much more," said Harriet.

"Far be it from me to take away anyone's grounds for kissing," said Siegman, "but I think Suddsy's dangerous friends are delusions of grandeur. Furthermore, with that elevator operator in on the deal no outsiders have a chance. That boy's out to make his fortune tonight—this will probably cost him six months in a sanatorium before he's allowed visitors . . ."

But I wasn't listening very hard, I was standing there, because looking down the corridor, I had seen the downstairs room open and Boris come out. No one else had seen him yet, though he was making no particular secret of his presence. I stood there motionless, trying to think how and when Boris had been able to get into the house. The chimney was an obvious and simple answer, but it wasn't much good because just then one of Boris's henchmen leaned out of the doorway. Harriet saw him and uttered a little gasp.

Siegman took a step forward to see what Harriet was looking at, and as he came between Boris and me, I reached out for the front door and opened it.

A second gunman came in from the street. This one looked as familiar as the first; statuettes of both were to be found among the half-dozen in the curtain on the floor; plus the three we had met before, these two made five—which left one more to go. With the side of my arm I brushed the pocket in which safely reposed, I fervently expected, Myshkin's sealed test-tube of compound.

Somehow it felt good, but because Harriet was clutching my other arm, I was tortured with anxiety for her safety. But I had gone along believing in Myshkin, and now I would have to go along to the end.

"Come in here, my friends," said Boris, indicating the room with a sweeping gesture, and that something that was small and resplendently silvery in his hand glittered as it moved. "Let's not congregate at the foot of a stairs like housewives discussing the superintendent's immoral life . . ." but the curtain had caught his eye.

He came part way down the corridor to have a look at it. When he saw the gold figures in it, he did not seem sur-

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prised. "Not quarreling over the spoils, are you?" he remarked, and then suddenly he caught sight of Roscoe reclining on the stairs.

"Who or what is this?" said Boris, staring at what was very likely the largest human being he had ever seen. He sounded oddly respectful. "An astrologer? Is this another trick of Myshkin's? This time instead of Gladys he sends a magician?"

From Boris' first words Roscoe had turned his head and looked through the stair railing without seeing anything. Then, as the high, piping voice continued to emanate apparently from the floor, Roscoe grunted and heaved until he was close enough to the railing to see Boris. Slowly a benign smile began spreading over his features. It grew to ecclesiastical proportions. "That voice," he murmured. "How it has haunted me! What visions and vapors it brings to mind! Does it indeed speak of Gladys? Then she's coming!"

"It won't work, my mountainous friend," said Boris. "That treacherous tomato isn't here, nor will she be."

"But I say she will!" Roscoe boomed. "And I am the wizard!"

"I say bah!" cried Boris, stamping a little foot. "I defy you!" He turned his furious gaze on us. His two goons hadn't made a sound or a move. One stood at the front door, behind us; the other waited at the entrance to the downstairs room. If I'd had any idea of physical resistance, the hand that each had in a pocket, where it made a patently overlarge bulge, was a sober deterrent. "Get into that room, all of you," said Boris, and to the gangster behind us, "Take that along." He pointed to the statuettes, and I noticed that his hand manipulated the gleaming object in it before the gunman moved.

We were at such close quarters that he was forced to brush by me. This was the first and sole instance of actual contact between any of us and any of Boris' companions, which was unfortunate because later there was no one with whom I could compare the sensation of that momentary touch—of something soft and light and delicate.

I didn't think about it then because the gunman who'd gathered up the curtain had then tried to lift it—and couldn't. He tried again. This time he got the curtain about two inches off the floor before he had to let it drop. It was incredible. The gold was heavy, but Myshkin had carried it around with him in a cardboard box, and even the incapacitated Roscoe, despite vast groanings, had transported it without being particularly aware that it was on his person. I had been looking from the gunman to Boris, watching how his fingers had not stopped moving until he said, in a voice that he tried to keep low, but which broke on him nevertheless: "All right, let it go. Lieutenant, you take it." The gunman glided silently out of the way and flattened himself against the wall. I gathered the curtain, picked it up and let it swing in my hand.

"Don't get any ideas," said Boris, managing a little smile. "Some boys are better at some things than others. Mine are good at shooting. Now let's get into this room."

I led the way, and Harriet, holding my free hand, followed. Behind her Roscoe came stumbling along, with Siegman pushing him valiantly from the rear. Then came Boris, and finally the two gunmen, one of whom closed the door. Inside, at the far end of the room, near the forge, stood number three of Boris' henchmen for the evening. The face and clothes tallied with the sixth statuette.

So Myshkin had been right about them so far. Now what I had to do was get them close together, then see if Myshkin had been right about every-

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thing.

"ISN'T this cozy?" said Boris.

"Listen, Myshkin—" said Siegman.

"Who are you calling Myshkin?" Boris demanded.

"You," said Siegman. "I know there's no such thing as you, and I don't care how strong the illusion of you is, but it's not strong enough to make me doubt that I'm talking directly to its perpetrator."

"What utter nonsensical kind of nonsense *is* this?" cried Boris.

"Listen to me, Myshkin," Siegman went on undeterred. "I know something about forensic medicine. If you give yourself up now you can plead insanity with spectacular success. Don't add any more crimes to your already imposing list."

"Possibly," said Boris, "you are again attempting to hypnotize me?"

"You see," said Siegman, turning to me with a smile.

"He thinks you're Myshkin," I said to Boris. "He thinks you, as Myshkin, are trying to get us out of the way so you can make off with the gold."

"Gold?" said Boris distantly. "What is gold to me? A mere substance for a few basic experiments. As for Myshkin," he went on, "at this moment I could hardly wish anyone a worse fate than to be in Myshkin's shoes, including Myshkin."

"What do you mean by that?" I said.

"Finally, in reference to that imposing list," Boris went on, ignoring me. "I say it is to the everlasting shame of this government that even though he will undoubtedly be dealt with harshly, it will be for comparatively trivial offenses. His truly depraved crimes have been against my people. But, I have done what I can," Boris concluded with resignation, "and now I must turn it over to others, for ultimate disposition."

"Boris," I said, "you and I have always gotten along—"

"Keep your hand out of your pocket," Boris interrupted me coldly. "You—" he said. It was the only way he addressed his henchmen, I'd noticed; this time he meant the one near the forge. "Come here. Keep a close watch on these people." To me he added, "It won't be for long. On my word, I mean no harm. Presently we shall hear a commotion in the street, after which I expect the police will not be long in hot-footing it here. Then, my friends, comes my final farewell, and I am off to seek a way through this hostile world to my own kind."

"Why are you keeping us here?" I asked. As the gunman approached us from the forge, I turned slightly to face him. Thus I had all three of Boris' henchmen in a curving line shaped like a question mark, with little Boris for the dot. All this, as Myshkin would probably have said, was probably highly symbolic, but the maneuver might have gone unobserved except for Siegman's reaction. He had guessed what I was up to.

"A frame-up," said Boris, in candid answer to my question. By then Siegman's panic had been communicated to Harriet. Boris caught it there and quickly traced it back. He had been saying, "It's a simple arrangement, really—" but he broke off and looked at me.

I sometimes wonder what his next words would have been if we hadn't had an interruption. Interruption may not be quite the word, but at least it's no overstatement, because what happened was that the house almost fell in. There was an instant's warning accidentally provided by Boris' pause in the conversation, then a wild, tootling horn growing louder—then suddenly, very close, the sound of a roaring motor. Next came

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the shuddering crash as Suddsy's truck plowed into the house, smashing and splintering its way through the wide arch-shaped wooden door on the ground floor. Fortunately the truck's impact against the door had turned its front wheels. It swerved, hit the forge, swerved again and came to a sudden stop —crushing Myshkin's machine against a wall. That was what almost tore the house down. The walls trembled and the motor rattled in death throes.

The sounds of the crash seemed very slow in fading away. Then, like it is in those dreams where you can't move, the truck door swung open and out tumbled the elevator operator, then Gladys, and finally Suddsy, all a little dazed, but none the worse for wear.

"Mr. Myshkin, darling!" Gladys screamed.

I had the test-tube out of my pocket. I yanked the stopper and whipped the contents across the question-mark of the three gunmen and Boris. They were getting ready to crow when it happened. I remember Boris falling back from the others, his face reflecting an agonized struggle, his little hands working like mad. That and his leap when Gladys had called him Mr. Myshkin was what saved him—or postponed his fate—whichever it turned out to be. Because Boris wasn't touched by the compound, and I'm not sure it would have harmed him anyway, in spite of Myshkin's beliefs. But he didn't escape the impact and those explosions either. The other three went up, of course. There must have been three explosions, but it turned into one prodigious blinding, golden blast with three black dots swimming away into the back of one's eyeballs. The wonder of it was that it was almost silent—a very soft *swoosh!*—as if a breeze had run through the house from the street. Only this one ran out and left us floating in a room filled with weightless, golden particles like prisoners inside one of those glass balls you shake to make a snow storm.

The first sound that came through to us was Boris' shriek of pain and fear. There was pain after the three tiny puffs of smoke in his hands, and his tiny, scorched palms had opened and let fall to the floor three small, strange objects that had once been gleaming silver and were now blackened and twisted enigmas. The fear was not so much because Boris was dazed, but because he knew it, and it was probably the first time in his brief existence that he realized there could be times when he was not in control of his faculties. A dozen bells must have rung memories deep in his memory as he shook his head, trying to clear his funny little brain, memories of green walls and quilted velvet ones, of old hopes succeeded by old despairs.

"It's no use," he kept saying. "It's no use. Myshkin's done for anyway."

"Mr. Myshkin, darling!" Gladys let go again.

Then Roscoe made a pass at her. She ran toward us and I caught her and held her off while Siegman got Boris safely out of the room. When Roscoe took over Gladys, I followed Siegman upstairs.

We could hear police sirens converging on the house. There was no time to lose, but we wasted some in useless effort to get Boris to talk. To all our pleading to tell us where Myshkin was, or what was happening to him, Boris only shook his head.

"Wait," he whispered weakly. "On my word, you haven't long to wait . . ."

Little Boris was right, but it was a minor accomplishment. The way things were happening now there couldn't be much waiting for anything. I remembered Siegman talking about the whirlpool. This was it. We were spinning faster and faster as we neared the vortex.

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Now the whole house was ringing with police sirens and brakes as squad cars came to skidding stops in front of the house. Through these sounds a single scream from below cut through everything — then another — then shooting broke out in the street. There were two shots, a scattered volley, then another scream farther down the street, while closer to us there was shouting among the cops to hold their fire. A moment later there were more shots in the distance and some of the squad cars in front of the house took off. I could only hope that whoever they were shooting at, even if it wasn't Myshkin, had gotten away.

But as I started down the stairs Roscoe came up under a full head of steam. He practically collapsed in my arms. When I asked him what the shooting had been about, he gasped something that sounded like: "A pair of pants chased Gladys down the street."

The next moment Siegman took hold of Roscoe. "Henry, get me a few minutes!" he said urgently. "I have an idea. Say anything, but get me a little time!" Then he pushed me downstairs.

When I went into the wrecked room I walked in upon the scene that was to become famous within twenty-four hours as Nulty's Nightmare . . .

I SUPPOSE you know the rest from what you've read. Still, possibly I can enlarge on some details that seem to have gotten lost in the shuffle. I could add a few that haven't even been mentioned yet, but as you know, there's been so much controversy about the Myshkin affair that we've all pledged to keep quiet—for a while longer, anyway. So about Nulty's Nightmare . . .

To begin with, Nulty had been in one of the squad cars outside. Thus, unfortunately, he was in the forefront of those who witnessed the episode in which practically no one places any credence—the bewildering, if edifying, spectacle of Gladys dashing out of the house, hotly pursued by a pair of trousers. I violate no confidence in stating that five police officers, besides Nulty, filed official reports on the matter, describing the scene in detail; *Time* quoted from two of the reports in its article. These were the officers who yelled for the shooting to stop. Their reason was that the trousers offered so poor a target that Gladys was in jeopardy. The officers who were shooting didn't know what they were shooting at, according to these others, but all argument surrounding the episode —including the two police who maintain that Gladys was *doing* the chasing—all such arguments are useless, and only add confusion to an already supremely chaotic series of events.

At any rate, the nightmare proper began a moment later when Nulty marched through the splintered door at the head of a police phalanx and began taking stock. There were four of us—Harriet, Suddsy, the elevator operator, and I—and we were, as one officer wrote: "in a clearly dazed and/or shocked condition." In addition, there was: "one light truck, badly damaged in a recent crash, its back doors split open." When he looked inside the trunk, Nulty had discovered Suddsy's neatly stacked merchandise.

I would like to remark, in passing, that the various estimates of the number of corpses found in the truck, attributed to "reliable sources" are uniformly extravagant. I understand the truck *was* rather crowded, but all talk of three or four dozen is nonsense.

Well, to complete the picture, conveniently close to where I was standing, Nulty encountered the six bars of gold that had been turned into statuettes.

Nulty's Nightmare was in full bloom. Not only he, but the other police were

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so completely lost for the first few minutes, that the problem of keeping them from going upstairs never really arose. The first they knew of Siegman's presence in the house was when he came tearing down the stairs and burst into the room. "Police!" he shouted, then seeing Nulty, dashed over, grabbed his lapels and began pouring out the story of where Myshkin was.

He was still yelling at Nulty, trying to make himself understood, and I think, almost frightening him, then the first commotion at the sea wall was heard. After that it didn't make any difference because the cops in the house rushed out, and others were already running toward the place from where Myshkin's first hoarse shouting had been heard.

Here again I'd like to make an observation. It has been pointed out that Siegman's effort to make Boris talk succeeded too late, and that Myshkin really saved himself. This is true, but it tends to obscure one of the most far reaching results of Siegman's effort. What Siegman had done was somehow to induce and manage Roscoe's participation in tricking Boris. The star-spangled robe and the ice cube turban had suggested the idea to everyone who'd seen Roscoe—including, as you recall, Boris. It was hardly a difficult matter, therefore, in Boris' stricken condition for Roscoe Cramwell, the accomplished actor, to play crystal gazer with compelling authority and rapid success.

Siegman says he doubts Cramwell ever gave a better performance in his life. He sat beside Boris, Siegman told me, crooning softly to him "of a future in which Boris reclined full length in a warm climate, beautifully dressed, tenderly watched over . . . ."

These words sound quite horrible, if one takes the more gloomy view of Boris' probable fate. Frankly I don't share it; I'll say why in a moment. But at the point where Myshkin's story merges with that of the police, we have one of its most surprising elements.

One might have expected the very name of the street would have been enough for the police—after all, Force Tube Avenue should have meant something to somebody. Actually, it referred to an ancient conduit buried under the length of the street. It ran from the sea wall to a sealed end a block and a half away. Once it had continued some distance farther and was part of the drainage system in the old city, but with both ends sealed, apparently it had been completely forgotten. Not even the fact that six men had vanished within a known, absurdly small compass, had been enough to stir official inquiry or recollection. The two entrances to the tube, via small cast-iron manhole covers at either end, were a profound source of chagrin to the police when they were finally established, but their very obscurity—especially the one in the sea wall—was probably the determining factor that saved Myshkin's life.

The gang, you see, knew about the tube and about the manhole at the inland sealed end. It was essentially what had made the idea of the robbery so irresistable, so seemingly foolproof, to them. After they pulled the job, they had only a short run to the deserted street—then down the tube, manhole cover pulled back over them, and there they were. There was plenty of room inside—the tube has been said to be anywhere from 15 to 21 feet in diameter—and they'd already put in supplies enough for a month's stay, if necessary.

Evidently some of their advance provisioning had taken place on one of the nights following the rebellion of the chicken-men. The best evidence is that one of the chicken-men fleeing Myshkin had dropped into the manhole while it was briefly open that night. Finding him-

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self among men, he silently retreated farther down the tube, with no one the wiser—but when the gangsters were gone, the replaced manhole cover had trapped him. Hopelessly, he wandered along the tube until he reached the sea wall end. On the other side of the metal lid, he could hear water lapping. It told him that not all of the lid was submerged, and indeed, an upper segment almost three feet high at the high point of its arch, was above the surface of the river because the tide was out. The manhole was at the top of the lid, within that unsubmerged segment. Moreover, rusted and frail with decades of neglect, it yielded to the chicken-man's desperate onslaught.

After his escape, naturally, he communicated this discovery to his compatriots. It suited them perfectly, and they established the sea wall end of the tube as their headquarters and all purpose laboratory. In addition to a good camouflage job on the lid's exterior, they'd obviously also done a little construction work on the manhole cover, because it was operating on hinges when Myshkin found it.

Myshkin had been led to its vicinity more than once in his relentless pursuit of the rebels, but it was only that last night he found the opening. That was after he'd escaped Nulty's surprise visit by making it up the chimney to the roof; later a bit, when we'd all left, and the coast was relatively clear, Myshkin had come down for a moment's examination of the scattered powder outside the front door, and using his glasses, discovered Boris' trail. The trail, of course, was made up of those countless, minute particles of yellow powder that Myshkin realized were constantly being shed by the chicken-men. Following his first fiasco, Boris had speedily retired to his secret headquarters; his trail led almost straight to it.

That was when Myshkin caught the surviving rebels and slaughtered them all—all but Boris, who had left again in the interim, and very likely for another attempt at Myshkin. What Myshkin wanted to do was make it easy to be found, but not without Gladys nearby—unless he took the chance of going back inside his own house and getting the green compound. It seemed too risky, and Harriet's apartment was a natural destination, so he phoned to ask Gladys to come downtown. When Harriet bollixed that up for him, he came uptown and confidently awaited Boris there.

When Boris broke and ran for the second time, Myshkin took off for the secret headquarters. He had gotten there before Boris and was still waiting for him when he saw us turn on the light upstairs in his place and came to join us. Finally, when Boris didn't show up, Myshkin went out again to investigate the headquarters.

He was aware, of course, that the chicken-men had had some sort of contact with the missing robber gang after he'd found the gold statuettes the first time he'd gone into the tube, but not knowing how long the tube was, it never occurred to him that the gang was actually using the same place to hide in. The acoustics experts are trying to figure out how it was possible for the chicken-men and the robbers simultaneously to inhabit opposite ends of the tube and not hear each other—but knowing of them beforehand, while the chicken-men may very well have heard voices and not been frightened away—how is one to explain the gangsters' unawareness of the chicken-men?

After all, they had built and assembled two or three machines inside the tube and used them there. However, badly wrecked as they were when the police swarmed into the tube in response to

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Myshkin's shouting from the manhole in the sea wall (he had explored far enough to hear the gang; the trouble was, they also heard him; without the black automatic that Boris had stolen, and which Myshkin still had, he'd never have held them off long enough) those machines may still be reconstructed.

If only they'll leave Myshkin alone long enough to do it, maybe they'll find out whether the machines really did work in complete silence; maybe they'll find out about some of the other things Myshkin says their machines did. Like the developments he says they made on his invention, using it hooked up with an enlarging and reducing circuit.

That, by the way, is how Myshkin explains Boris' henchmen. Myshkin says when the chicken-men were finally ready with their machine, they used the gangsters at the other end as models for their tests. Picked them up easily with infrared, he says, using six stolen bars of stolen gold to stuff into the machine. The statuettes had been the result. Then, according to Myshkin, they proceeded to more important experiments, and for these they used eggs. On the one hand they whipped up large life-like representations of the gangsters. At the other extreme they made tiny ones, the size of fleas. Boris controlled the large ones, says Myshkin, by means of minute radio transmitters—the silvery objects we had seen in his hands. Unfortunately these will also require reconstruction before they can be better understood.

But in the light of this explanation the explosions themselves become quite understandable. The gunmen were only blown-up suspensions of egg. If you like bad jokes you might go so far as to call them souffles. That was why one of them had felt so very odd brushing past me—and why he had been unable to lift the gold bars. Holding the gun that Boris had snaffled from the real gangsters was about all the egg versions could do. They probably couldn't have squeezed the trigger. Boris himself exploded the first three by radio impulses when they failed and he had to get going, but I got the same, if more spectacular, results from the green compound. When it touched it was like a needle fired at a nice fat balloon.

The tiny ones—the ones like fleas—are more difficult to understand, I think. Myshkin says Boris made them to be hidden in his (Myshkin's) clothes. He was supposed to have been wearing those clothes when he escaped from the hospital—which was why the escape was arranged at all. Myshkin supposes that if he'd ever put on those clothes, he'd have been overwhelmed, like Gulliver and the Lilliputians. It was very fortunate that the clothes had moved and Myshkin didn't find them at the hospital — especially because when Boris showed up later, dragging that worthless bundle all the way to Myshkin's place, the circumstance was so suspicious that Myshkin resolved not to go near it, even before he fully understood why. And this, like so much else in the case, must be left undetermined for the present.

You see, the pants never were caught. They were supposed to have been shot once or twice—"mortally wounded" said one report; "they staggered," said another—but nobody knows what became of them. All that can be said so far is that they've stayed away from Gladys—the new, reformed Gladys she's been since she got engaged to Myshkin—but it may be a long time before the Institute finally lets go of Myshkin and anything might happen.

As far as Harriet and I go, everything *has* happened. We're getting married just as soon as we have time. Right now we're busy, busy, busy all day with inquiries, investigations, and inquests.

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The Police Department keeps thinking up new questions, and drops hints about large sums of money waiting to be divided as a reward for the capture of the robbers. The War Department is interested in the green compound. This week a chiropractic delegation arrived from Indiana with questions on allergies. It's been like that every day, except the one when I was allowed to see Myshkin.

It was just for a few minutes and we couldn't get to talk about much, but of all the things I could have asked about, the one question that occurred to me was: "Myshkin, did all the chicken-men look like you?"

Characteristically, Myshkin didn't answer me.

"You know," he said softly, "I don't believe what they say about Roscoe. On my word, no." And he shook his head.

But I see I haven't made clear what he was referring to, so I will. Remember I said that Siegman's plan to make Boris talk wasn't what saved Myshkin, but this effort was nevertheless responsible for one of the most far-reaching results of the affair? After Myshkin had been saved, the robbers captured, and we'd all returned to the house, we suddenly remembered that Roscoe and Boris were still upstairs—but when we went up we found only Roscoe, sound asleep, with a peaceful smile stretched across his beard.

The dark suspicions that have since attached to him are based, first, on the fact that the stove was warm; second, the pile of chicken-bones on a plate beside him. Roscoe swears that Boris left unharmed, and that he merely warmed up the remains of the chicken and turkey that Harriet had brought earlier. I haven't seen any of the rumored reports that supposedly followed studies of the pile of bones, and claimed there proved to be too many of some kinds and too few of others.

I don't believe them. I like to think Roscoe fell asleep peacefully, and that Boris peacefully made good his escape. I feel as Myshkin did the day I was allowed to see him. "Somewhere in this world," he said, "Boris is seeking another like him. I don't think he'll find him," Myshkin concluded. "I don't think I will either."

THE END

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Special Features

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Other Worlds Book Shelf

THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay $1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in the world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.

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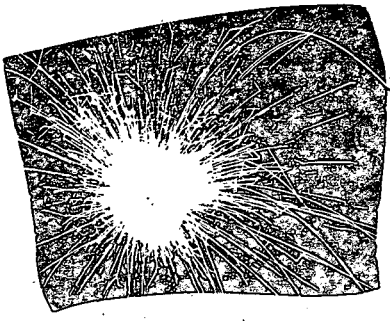

Nebulosities

There has been much said about the strange power of prophecy enjoyed by the French seer, Nostradamus. How does he stack up in the light of science and reason. What can we believe about prophecy; except in the light of the scientific method? Are we being scientific when we are being superstitious? What are the facts concerning Prophet of Provence?

* * *

MICHEL NOSTRADAMUS was born during the Christmas season of 1503 in the town of San Remy in the French district of Provence. He was destined to embark on a dangerous course, that of prophecy. In that day, prophets had to be cautious. The populace was seized by witchcraft mania and offenders were burned at the drop of a broomstick. Yet Nostradamus had little need to be cautious, for he was championed by the Church. In fact his first *Almanachs* were dedicated to the pope, and although the cry of sorcery was raised against him, the Inquisition took no notice. (*Nostradamus — The Man Who Saw Through Time; McCann*)

Among Nostradamus' patrons were King Henry II of France; Catherine de Medici and Mary, Queen of Scots, whose fates he supposedly read. Much farther ahead, his verses describe a strong German nation making aggressive war on France, intermittent peace and war, leagues and unrest. Modern enthusiasts have excitedly chattered about certain fulfillment here in this century's two world wars, League of Nations and U. N.

But such conclusions prove hasty. They are based only on one-sided arguments. Nostradamus' prophetic works were in verse quatrains of mystically phrased riddles. They are known by their title, the *Centuries*. His French, to quote McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopoedia*, was "rough, rude, unintelligible, and incorrigible." As the author hoped, his confused garble has helped keep his works alive, arresting the eyes of the credulous generation after generation. However, the above authority likewise observes that such construction invited "bold forgeries or violent adaptations to new occurrences." Similarly, the *Cyclopoedia* says of many alleged prophetic works claimed for Nostradamus but never found that they "afforded a tempting and plausible foundation for the

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forgery of later prognostications, and their attribution to Nostradamus." In short, they were written after the event and not before it. Two collections published after the seer's death are flatly rejected as almost certainly spurious and the authority of even the well-known forecasts is highly questioned.

Typical is the alleged prediction Nostradamus made of his own death. Opposite his calendar date for June 30, 1566, he is asserted to have written, "death about this time." (He died on July 2.) But he was a student of astrology and, of course, familiar with the superstitious forecasts for certain days. The *Cyclopoedia* notes that the forecast of Joannes Lydus for June 30, 1566 was, "If it thunder death will shortly abound," and suggests Nostradamus' entry (if indeed it was *his* entry) was but a modification of that oracle. In summary, the *Cyclopoedia* declares: "The collection is a treasury of unmeaning nonsense; the vaticinations are words, words, words, of doubtful manufacture and more dubious meaning, which scarcely even rattle as they fall."

Thus the hand of Nostradamus probably did not write all that the name now claims. Truthfully, the interpreters have been more ingenious than the prophet. McCann concedes that interpretations of the quatrains are "tricky and dualistic." Henry C. Roberts, outstanding modern Nostradamus authority and promoter, argues that the incoherent style is a sure sign of prophecy. Yet he frankly admits that he had taken a new slant "in the light of recent events." It is a case of making Mr. Roberts as much the prophet as Nostradamus!

Nostradamus claimed divine revelation. Apparently not a great deal of it, judging from the relative handful of his predictions that have any faint claim for accuracy out of the hundreds he wrote. Even with these, coincidence and clever interpretation do their bit. Also, the oracle fired in so many directions that he was bound to score sometimes.

Nostradamus' followers are touchy on the point of calling him an astrologer, but more impartial sources freely do so. He certainly studied astrology and he repeatedly linked the signs of the zodiac with his forecasts. In the dedicatory letter to his son at the head of the first edition of his prophecies, he wrote his intention to "leave a memorial of me after my death, to the common benefit of mankind, concerning the things which the Divine Essence hath revealed to me by astronomical revolutions."

Nostradamus was completely biased in favor of his native France. In fact, his prophecies rotate largely around the political fortunes of France. He was purportedly a Catholic. So bitterly did he despise early Protestants that he thought the gruesome Inquisition a necessary evil. It is this that makes his prophecies amusing, for he foretells the evils of a like system, as McCann interprets it, under Hitler. But the biographer quotes the seer as saying this German leader would be of a "new and far worse heresy" than any Protestant yet known. Yet Hitler was a recognized born and baptized Catholic. How wrong can you get? Strange to say, though, the seer seems to say that the Catholic papacy would fall. When a papal court got hold of this in 1781 it saw enough "daylight" to get this point and promptly condemned the *Centuries*. Perhaps this was one more example of "shooting in all directions." The sincere critic, however, is soon convinced, after a study of the quatrains themselves, minus the insinuations of interpreters, that neither they nor Nostradamus knew what he was talking about! The stars he interpreted weren't the ones we see through telescopes today.

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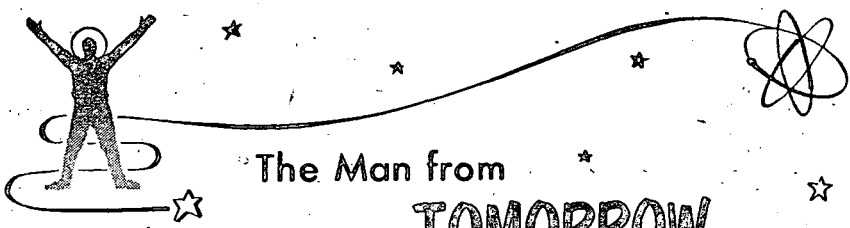

The Man from TOMORROW

THE greatest comet of all recorded history will approach the Earth within the next twenty years. This comet will astound astronomers, because its behavior will not conform to the usual comet. It will approach very close to the earth, within 200,000 miles, and will actually seem to circle the Earth. It will be visible at this very close range for four days, and will be seen to give out portions of itself which astronomers will fear will strike the Earth. None of them will. Then the comet will veer away from the Earth and sweep around the sun and out of sight, but will be visible for many months through telescopes.

Following the visit of the comet, there will be strange changes in the Earth's atmosphere, and there will be many disturbing new phenomena reported, which will make the flying saucer reports of the previous fifteen years seem rather commonplace.

Accompanying this cometary visit will be a tremendous political and social upheaval. There will be much governmental unrest, and many governments will be replaced by new ones. There will be a series of revolutions, covering all continents. There will also be a series of natural upheavals which will result in great destruction and loss of life.

General Eisenhower will not be re-elected in 1956.

Two hundred years from now, man will enter into another period of the dark ages, in which he will repeat his destruction of books and libraries, and his records and sciences, and reduce himself to ignorance. However, he will be saved from his folly by presence on Earth of a new group of people who will come from the sky. They will first arrive in large ships, but will later arrive by a mysterious method which can be likened to radio transmission of matter, although that will not be the medium used.

Within ten years aerial treatment of whole cities subjected to the threat of epidemics will avoid such epidemics. This will follow the discovery of how to predict such epidemics. These new plagues will be of the nerve type, such as poliomyelitis.

Nerve disorders will far outnumber any other type of disease, and they will be found to be caused by an atmospheric condition which will be given an impetus by the unknown effects of atomic energy and atomic radiation loosed into the atmosphere, and into the water of the Earth by explosions and by the gearing of the atom to power.

Russia will enter upon a period of destruction, and its position as a world power will decline by a strange series of misfortunes which will be caused by natural forces, by political mistakes, by

(Concluded on page 159)

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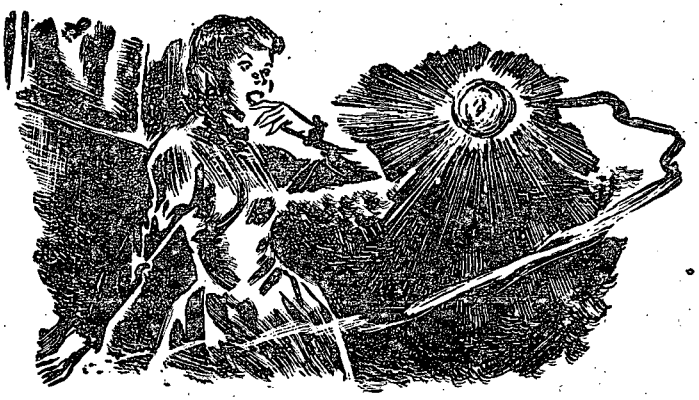

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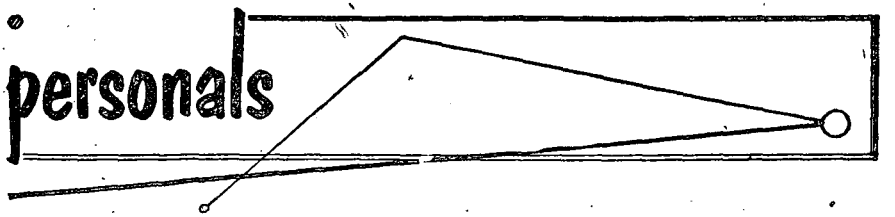

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LETTERS

CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY, 806 DEMPSTER STREET, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

S. J. Byrne

What's the matter with you guys? By that I mean you, Ray, and Thomas Granville, with reference to the latter's letter in the January issue anent supposed discrepancies in the plot of THE GOLDEN GUARDSMEN. First T. G. points out that I'm wrong, and then you go ahead and agree with him—and you missed the chance of looking down your nose and saying, "I *beg* your pardon, but there is a discrepancy in *your* argument!"

Germain could not have utilized the coordinated powers of the "flying disk" creatures to avoid the battle with the Nrlani sky city, because at that particular time the thought had not yet jelled in his mind that he could apply the faith-effect-cause system to them. That came to him after he had emerged from the second plane. On the other hand, the Nrlani couldn't have done it either because they were soulless monsters who knew nothing at all about faith!

I'll take a rap, Rap, when I've got it coming, but if I'm going to be a good loser I'm also going to stick to my guns when I'm right! (No hard feelings—just a generalized "harrumph!").

Now Stu, you know very well that there are a lot of people reading science fiction today who bridle instantly the word faith, mystic, Shaver or dianetics is mentioned. We must allow people to have their little cul-de-sacs, and Mr. Granville (and your editor) are no exception. OF COURSE you are right, Stu. Aren't we all?—Rap.

R. E. Downs

This may be my first letter to any Scientific Magazine, but I am no newcomer having read them for several years. Having read "Other Worlds" since its first printing, I would like to say it is tops in its field.

I've been told there are people of the opposite sex who read this type of literature. I've always been of the opinion that girls nowadays could only comprehend such magazines as "True Love" etc. I would appreciate hearing from any in this area, who read and can comprehend these Science Magazines.

Keep up the good work Ed. on O.W. and I'll remain a steady fan. I would like very much to get in contact with any fan clubs in this area.

Box 403
Rodeo. Calif.

We admire your astuteness! We are, indeed, a Scientific Magazine! Yes, there are at least 4 out of 10 of our readers who are of that sex known as opposite, but more specifically referred to by your editor as "those wonderful, lovely creatures." We can appreciate your desire to latch on to a few, as we have the same desires. Okay, girls, give him a tumble—and remember the scarcity of men!
—Rap.

R. S. Craggs

I buy OTHER WORLDS on the newsstands when I can find it; think it

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is on the way to becoming one of the best s-f mags. Your Atlantis article in Nov. issue is one of the best I have seen for the s-f student. I am especially interested in s.f. with an archaeological background.

Shaver's "Beyond the Barrier" reminds me somewhat of E. R. Burroughs, not too much science compared to fantasy. The passing of the planets through the barrier was probably the nearest to development of an actual scientific theory.

Like your MAN FROM TOMORROW. With the exception of the discovery of a new species of —? the predictions are commonplace. As I understood it Picard was merely going up about 30 miles to observe Mars. Even if he could exist during a journey to Mars, how could he direct his unwieldly craft to coincide with the passage of the planet? Your forecast about conservation of natural resources is already true in part. The use of chemical fertilizers has been seriously questioned for some time; a Pa. publisher has been publishing a magazine on the subject for 3 years. Actually, few adherents to the natural method (scientists) advocate the abolition of all chemical fertilizers. The importance of trace elements in the soil is being increasingly recognized. The Chinese have been returning all waste to the soil for centuries. Our rivers wouldn't contain so much soil if our land was cropped more intelligently.

25 McMillan Ave.
West Hill
Ontario, Canada

You are merely expressing the objections to Picard we left unsaid because they were obvious. But apparently the news reports were, as usual, very divergent—and the one we read said specifically that he was planning a trip TO Mars.

When you mention the Chinese returning all waste to the soil for centuries, you inspire a real horror in us. If you only knew what you were saying! Yes, they DO this. But they do it WRONG. This waste material should first be made septic before being spread on the land. Do you realize that the incidence of hookworm, pin worm, and a dozen other and more horrible worm infestations which have a ghastly effect on the national health, resulting in incredible deformities, early death, and incredible suffering, are due ENTIRELY to this process you praise? As for the chemical fertilizers, we are in favor of that, but only when it is applied in natural form, and not in combination with ACIDS designed to speed up its availability. THESE chemicals are NOT good.

Editors, Theosophical Notes

We observe L. Sprague de Camp at his favorite sport of occultist-baiting with his series on "Lost Continents" in your magazine. He aims at discrediting the whole idea; the relationship between Theosophy and Atlantis and Lemuria is such that no lost continents, no Theosophy. Hence we are interested. In this instance, de Camp finds his case weak enough on geological facts to be tempted into trying to do something about the moral character of H. P. Blavatsky, founder of the modern Theosophical Movement.

He makes seventeen statements about her, of which the following seven are true: (1) She was the greatest of modern occultists and successor to Cagliostro and Simon Magus (both of whom have been lied about almost as much as she has); (2) She was fat and middle-aged; (3) She was Russian; (4) She was living in New York City; (5) She was the es-

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tranged wife of a Russian general; (6) She had worked briefly in a sweat-shop; (Sewing neckties to tide over slow arrival of publisher's checks); (7) She did take as her "occult partner" Henry Steel Olcott. (But Henry was not a lawyer. He was an ex-Army intelligence man from the Civil War with rank of Colonel, and at the time he met Madame Blavatsky, was doing free-lance journalism and writing up the spiritualist movement. He did not "leave" his family for H.P.B.; he was at outs with them long before; and even in the hottest times, when all the lies that could be invented were being thrown at them, even their worst enemies suggested (at least in print) no immoral relations between the two.)

She never was a professional-pianist (though we have never understood that that was particularly damning.) She was never a circus rider, and she was never a medium, as we have previously pointed out in *Future Science Fiction* for Sept. 1952.

Ordinarily the dead and their friends have no protection against this kind of thing; but her case is a little different. On June 1, 1890, the *New York Sun* published an article on H.P.B. much in de Camp's style, and on July 20th followed it with an article by Elliot Coues, also in de Camp style, but containing several allegations against her that he seems to have overlooked; including that of her being a Russian spy; and an accusation that she had had a deformed illegitimate son by Prince Emile de Wittgenstein. It is also interesting, in view of de Camp's acceptance of Coleman's charges, that she plagiarized *Isis Unveiled* from certain authors, that this article names Baron De Palm as the real author of *Isis*—who is not mentioned by Coleman or de Camp. (It seems that if you are going to publish a lie on a certain point, you should take measures to see that somebody does not publish another contradicting it.)

Madame Blavatsky brought suit for libel. The resulting situation is described in *The History of the Theosophical Movement*, p. 220, 1925 edition, as follows:

"At the time, the *Sun* was perhaps the most widely circulated and influential of American newspapers. It had at its command every resource of ability, influence, and money, and it is not to be supposed that it was unfamiliar with the technicalities of the New York State laws relating to libel or the difficulties in the way of anyone who might try to obtain a verdict against it in such a suit. It had but to establish in court its own good faith and prove or show reasonable cause for belief in and circulation of a single one of its major charges, and the whole history of American jurisprudence in similar cases showed that it would be acquitted. But one thing favored the suit of H.P.B.: the fact that this time, quite the contrary to the Coulomb charges, the S.P.R. report, and the numerous prior attacks upon her and her mission—*this time the charges were direct, made as statements of fact, not of opinion, hearsay, conclusion, inference, or innuendo.* If H.P.B. was actually *guilty* of a single one of the offenses charged against her, she was ruined, ineradicably branded with the stigma of a convicted rogue — her enemies triumphant, her Society exploded, her followers buried in ignominy, her mission and her "Theosophy" a thing of contempt and of derision.

"The issue was squarely joined, with no possibility of evasion by either party to the suit."

The suit dragged until early spring of 1891, and the *Sun's* lawyers finally confessed in open court their inability to prove the charges of immorality. As a face-saver, they tried to retain irrele-

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vant matter which the court ordered stricken out. Before the suit was terminated, H.P.B. died on May 8th, ending the proceedings on her part. William Q. Judge, who had been also named in the libellous articles, continued his own suit. On Sept. 26, 1892, the *Sun* printed a full retraction as to both Judge and Blavatsky, and an article by Judge giving the facts; which, as the *Sun* said: "disposes of all questions relating to Madame Blavatsky as presented by Dr. Coues." At her death the *New York Tribune* also printed a laudatory editorial on her, denouncing her slanderers.

Now: either de Camp knows about this episode or he does not. If not, he is no authority on "occult" history. If he does, he is falsifying history by the suppression of crucial facts and the representation for the benefit of the ignorant, of exploded charges. The incident gives one very interesting sidelight on the evolutionary mechanism of this kind of lie; how Metrovich's orphaned child mentioned by de Camp, got twisted around into a deformed child of H.P.B.'s by Prince Wittgenstein. Both Metrovich and Wittgenstein were mentioned in the libel; where she was claimed to have been mistress of both; but no mention made of the Metrovich child, who actually existed.

H.P.B. was as a child, a rough, tough, tom-boy of manners and appearance. more masculine than feminine, never was a beauty at best; and during most of her adult life was fat and was never in her life accused of being seductive—yet we are presented with a parade of the world's most capable connoisseurs of female flesh seized at sight with a mad desire for her! She married Blavatsky at 16 on a bet as the result of being taunted with her unattractiveness, and left him a few days later in a highly unpeaceful manner. A new light was shed on that episode by a medical certificate given by Dr. Leon Oppenheim of Wurzburg on Nov. 3, 1885, witnessed by Dr. Roeder, District Medical Officer, to the effect that she not only had never had a child— she had a congenital malformation rendering her incapable of sexual relations. Such was the "charmer" alleged to have "lived in sin" with all these experienced and presumably critical rakes!

It is impossible, as a matter of space, if nothing else, to analyze the balled-up mess that de Camp presents as Theosophy. Every time he writes on the *Secret Doctrine* we get the impression that he must have "mastered" it by sitting down with a pipe and a glass of rum and flipping its 1500 pages for an hour or two.

On the matter of "evidence"— there is plenty, but to make it clear, one would have to reconstruct most of the Theosophical terminology in modern terms, it having been largely taken from medieval occultism, the nearest thing then available, or what is still the *terra incognita* of Sanskrit. Too many *facts* are there for any sort of coincidence—as he "explains" the cases of *Gigantanthropus* and *Meganthropos*.

As a few samples—"the seven bodies that each of us carries with him" are not bodies. They are "*principles*" of which one is the mind, one is consciousness, one the moral nature, one the bio-electric field of force, one is vital energy, one the physical body, and one the emotional nature. De Camp might try his teeth on Kilner's "Human Aura" in regard to the actuality of some of these "principles." It gives a recipe that can be tried out.

As to geology being against the existence of "Lemuria"—every coral atoll and every ring-reef around an island proves a submersion equal to the depth from the present surface to the base of the formation. A contour map of the bottom of the South Pacific, lifted ac-

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cordingly, will show a pretty substantial continent; and in *Science* a few years ago was a rather detailed description of a sunken river bed several hundred miles long north-west of Australia. The same journal has described the San Onofre Brecchia, a gravel formation between Los Angeles and San Diego, stated therein to have been deposited from the *West "by a river of continental size."* H.P.B. stated in the *Secret Doctrine* that a part of the coast of California had been part of Lemuria. There are several subterranean "gaps" along the coast of Southern California, the Bolsa Chica, West Basin, and others, with river-bed deposits up to 400 feet below sea level. As a civil engineer, the writer has inspected logs of test borings telling the same story all over that region, and bored some himself.

The sunken canyon of the Hudson River and some others on the East coast, as well as the Challenger Ridge, tell the same story about Atlantis; as do the "channels" and pinnacle reefs of Alaska, which the writer spent a summer in surveying, concerning Lemuria.

Evidences of Madame Blavatsky's foreknowledge swarm in every science.

But de Camp does not show himself very well versed in saying that there are "over a dozen" fossil forms "intermediate" between man and ape known. There is no reputable evolutionist who considers these forms "intermediate." It is held that man and ape descended from a common ancestor, without known cross-connections, and that these forms are independent branches.

Why go on? When "coincidences" run into hundreds—and we have a card-index of them of that order—they stop being coincidences.

As to the charge that H.P.B. wrote the "Mahatma Letters:" aside from internal evidence, the circumstances of the writing and reception of some of them were such that for her to have written them would involve the commanding of a conspiratorial organization that would put Joe Stalin's gang in the shade. As a mere sample: Sinnett, who at the time was toying with the same suspicion, sent her a letter at Amritsar to be forwarded by her to one of the Mahatmas. She received it at 2 p.m. on October 27th Sinnett, who was at Allahabad, received a wired reply from Jhelum, dated 4 p.m. the same day; and Jhelum was eight hours from Amritsar by train. Sinnett was instructed to see the original at Jhelum. He found that it was in the same "Mahatma" handwriting that H.P.B. is accused of faking. Her enemies tried to get around that, first, by supposing that the postal authorities faked a postmark for her; and when that notion didn't seem to do too well, that she had wired the right reply to a confederate at Jhelum. In other words, when receiving an unexpected letter on a trip, she had the foresight to be eight hours away from a confederate who was trained to fake that particular writing, as well as she could. Meantime, Major Henderson, Chief of the British Indian Police, was on her trail checking the post and telegraph offices for her supposed activities as a "Russian Spy." He found no traces of such activities or other skullduggeries. As we say, this is just a sample. There are about 500 pages of published "Mahatma Letters," and they are involved in dozens of such evidential incidents.

Also, when de Camp states that her authorship of these letters was proven by handwriting experts, he omits to mention that the experts in question, Sims and Netherclift, each independently reached the conclusion that she had *not* written them; this held up the report of the S.P.R. prosecutor—or persecutor—of H.P.B., Hodgson, until he got back to England; then, after a *personal* in-

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terview with Netherclift and Sims, *they reversed their opinion.* What could he *tell* them that reversed the *internal* evidence of the Letters? "Res ipse loquitur;" in other words, the thing stinks for itself. Two other things happened in connection with these letters; the court handwriting expert at Berlin said she did *not* write them; and Netherclift himself later, in the Parnell vs. *London Times* suit, identified as genuine a letter afterward confessed as a forgery in open court.

Anyone who wants the *facts* about Madame Blavatsky, should read the above-mentioned *History of the Theosophical Movement*, also Beatrice Hasting's periodical *New Universe*, and her *Defense of Madame Blavatsky;* K. F. Vania's *Madame H. P. Blavatsky*, Sinnett's *Incidents In the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, Mary Neff's *Personal Memoirs of H. P. Blavatsky*, and Madame Blavatsky's own personal letters to Sinnett and to Prof. Corson.

Box 65
Berkeley, Calif.

We present this rather long (and much deleted) reply to de Camp's articles because OTHER WORLDS is impartial, and willing to present both sides of ANY argument. Besides, Atlantis and Lemuria have been CHIEF SUBJECTS of both Science Fiction and Occultists since the beginning of both. It's just that we look at them from different viewpoints. It would be a sad thing if there had never been any Atlantis theme for our science fiction writers, wouldn't it? And it looks like nobody will ever settle the argument, beyond heaving an actual Atlantean city back up out of the depths. That we would like to see!

—Rap.

Anonymous (T.D.)

Whoever wrote "Nebulosities" in the January issue has something approaching ignorance in his understanding of science, of scientific thinking and methods. But before I enter into any discussion of science, let me assure him that a college degree does *not* make the owner an authority in anything. The degree merely indicates the satisfactory completion of a college curricula; what is important is the ability of the individual to use his brains and apply his knowledge after graduation. In some instances, individuals have contributed important studies in original research prior to graduation. In all cases, degree or no degree, if the man has no ability he certainly cannot avoid revealing it to his co-workers and subsequently finds himself without work in that field.

Around us are many products—the life-saving medicines, the developments of industry and so on—that *are* the results of conclusions drawn from experiments, that *were* made by men who possess books (and used them when necessary) and which *were* first conceived in theory. Yet, the writer of Nebulosities writes: "The real scientist is the one who does not possess a single book—the one who carries his Know-How in his noodle. Theory is for the birds. Ability to DO is knowledge. Why can't scientists refrain from drawing conclusions from experiments?"

Essentially, the above definition of a *real* scientist is an opinion. It does not hold true in real life. In a scientific sense, we can say the real scientist definition is a theory but when the theory is compared to the real facts it can be seen it is no good, the theory must be disgarded and rebuilt around the facts.

A scientist observes a physical phenomena, tries to understand it, puts it into a analytical form, tests his analysis by a series of rigid experiments and

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then establishes his conclusion. The conclusion *must* fit the real facts of nature's laws. No exceptions.

(You know, for a scientist to carry all his knowledge in his head, he would have to memorize a stack of books about the size of a set of the encyclopedia Britannica. Even then he still would have to know what his fellow scientists are doing or be left behind).

The Nebulosities' writer also criticizes a 1930 physics book for at least one item which is (supposedly) wrong because a present day text says the item is now different. What the writer misses is the situation that knowledge of science is far from complete and that any book expresses the knowledge according to the information of the day it was written. I enclosed "supposedly" in parenthesis because the item quoted can still be incorrect because of future discoveries. But, as of now and to the best of our present knowledge the quoted item is correct (except that any scientist is aware that nature's laws are still incompletely known).

As for "authorities," there are people who know more about their particular field (editing, acting, engineering, etc.) than anyone else. Surely, if anyone is an authority, it would be these. If anyone writes an able book on his field, the book *is* an authority. But never forget that there are groups of individuals who are already striking beyond into new territory, pushing ahead of the authority. (The authority, usually, does not rest on his laurels either—He is pushing on, also).

So, writer, get hep to what science really is, what is going on. Perhaps a talk with a few writers of scientific articles would help. And don't forget science is not static, nor intentionally secretive as is obvious from an examination of the scientific journals.

Cleveland, Ohio

Nothing like a good argument, but we don't think yours is too good. The first thing you agree with us on is that college degrees don't make an authority. No argument. Speaking of the "products" of research which we gratefully use today, they were the result of original thinking, not of reading books. If it were as you say, then all you have to do to invent something new is look it up in a book. Paradox? What about the really BIG inventions? All of them sheer inspiration. Just as a beginning, the wheel?

A real scientist is one who does not refer to his books when asked a question—he KNOWS the answer. It's what he DOESN'T know that makes him a scientist. The scientist does NOT establish a CONCLUSION (look up the word) after a series of rigid tests. It is a RESULT he arrives at. A "fact" insofar as a fact can be known.

You certainly make OUR point with your comment that even the new book on the atmosphere is wrong, because future discovery will make it so. What were we SAYING! There is no such thing as a NATURAL LAW. Look up the word law in the dictionary. You are calling Nature a PERSON? Law is enacted by an individual or a person. Who enacted the natural laws you refer to? Don't you mean that there exist a series of related phenomena which, upon observation, always follow certain paths? Is that a law? Or is it a mystery!

Now about "authorities." I'll take only the case I KNOW about, my own. I have decided it would be ridiculous to write a book about either writing or editing, in spite of my long experience. Do you know why? Because I've discovered that all my experience has led to one thing, that constantly new ways to write and edit are necessary, or you won't be in business long. What would you say if we published the first issue of Amazing Stories all over again? You'd

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say—brother, is he a lousy editor. He don't know from nothing! RIGHT NOW, Bea and I are struggling to learn a little something about the PROPER way to edit OTHER WORLDS, and all we know is that the old methods just don't do! So, what is "authority" but the outmoded past? And if you depend on it, you are going to be a first-class FAILURE. Don't say we didn't warn you. And that goes for all your 1930 textbooks. Your only good point is to keep up with modern thinking and the experiments of your contemporaries. Lucky for some authorities that they DO keep pushing on.

As for science being secretive, did we say that? Well, we'll say it again, then, but more clearly. Science is not secretive. Scientists WANT to exchange information, but today, Science is being strangled by war-mongering politics. And if we sound like a red, don't you believe it! Let's hear YOU say: "Science today is operating in a perfectly free atmosphere, unfettered, undictated to, undirected except by itself." If you can say that, you are the biggest liar WE ever met!—Rap.

Patricia Terlizzi

Re the letter of Mr. Hall I have some questions to ask. Do not for a minute think that I mean to cast any aspersions on the intelligence or reasoning powers of Mr. Hall. I am only trying to enlighten myself as to how he reached his remarkable conclusions and was able to state that you were dealing in "wild speculation." I would like to ask first if Mr. Hall has studied much history? If he has then it would seem that I spent several years listening to professors who didn't know what they were talking about.

Why must man, who strives and seeks for knowledge about all nature, scorn the truth about himself? Many extremely intelligent people insist on ignoring the past with its lessons and cloaking the truth in mystery. One has only to pick up a history book to see how the past is edited to suit the political needs of the time. No matter what place or century is examined the blue pencil of man is slashed across the pages of time.

The history of a nation is written not by them but by the people who overpower them. To accept history as it is written without peering beyond the deletions and additions would be foolish to an extreme.

Those men who have found the lost cities of the ancients have been those who looked beyond history to the legends and found the truth.

The ancient races of South and Central America and Mexico are regarded by many as savages not capable of anything but warring among themselves and making human sacrifices. That is the way in which the Spanish changed or edited history to suit themselves. If we believe this Spanish version, that they were ignorant of smelting, had no means of transportation, no domesticated animals, and knew nothing of higher mathematics, how then are we to explain the very existence of these races? They quarried huge blocks of stone weighing up to 200 tons, carried them miles across rugged terrain and erected buildings which without mortar have withstood the test of time and man. These blocks were many sided yet each one fit precisely with the others. They were delicately carved and in some places painted with pigments which have retained their brightness to the present day and which we cannot duplicate. The buildings, individually and in groups were so geometrically perfect that no defect can be found in them with the finest of modern precision instruments. How explain the articles of elastisized rubber, found in the cenote at Chichen-Itza, placed

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there long before the birth of Christ? How explain the jewelry and figurines of pure Chinese Jade in a place where the existence of China was unknown and there was no way of getting there anyhow? How explain carvings of elephants and bearded men in a place where neither existed?

In the history of our own country this "editing" is also evident in many places. Abraham Lincoln was disliked by many and violently hated by others. In history he is admired and revered. Must we accept the teachings that the Civil War was fought to free the slaves and that the Southern soldiers were gallant and the Northern soldiers were courageous? Newspapers and diaries of the time tell accounts of cruelty unimaginable on both sides; Rape, looting, children's skulls used for ashtrays, rings carved from human bone, books bound in human skin. The United States marched on Mexico after American individuals had grabbed up the rich lands of Texas. It is known in history as the uprising of a suppressed people. In time to come school children will read pages about the devilish sneak attack of the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, but only a few words about the battleship which a decade earlier sailed into a Japanese harbor and said either open up for trade with us or we'll blow you up.

If the Axis had won the war, would not the history of that war been written differently? Hitler would not be known as a madman but as a savior of his people who protected the Aryan race against the barbarian Allies.

I stand firm with the gentleman who said "my country, right or wrong, still my country." But why blind ourselves to the facts of the past, not only of our own country but of the whole world? It might be that we could learn a few lessons. The truly great men have been those who loved mankind deeply, knowing and sometimes amused by the faults and blindness of man.

Mr. Hall compares Rome to the United States and Sparta to Russia. Rome and Sparta both had classes made up of the ruling classes and soldiers, the private citizens who paid well for the privilege, and slaves. Sparta fell before overwhelming odds and most Spartans died in defense of their city. Their boast was that Sparta's men were her walls. Rome fell because of its own decadence. Most Romans were willing to let the barbarians into the city itself and pay them large amounts of ransom rather than risk their own precious hides. Couldn't you find a more flattering example for us to follow Mr. Hall?

One more thing and I will drag this rambling letter to a close. Why do most people seem to take the "flying saucers" for a modern myth? Little men and people from other worlds are a common part of the folk lore of all nations. I wouldn't be surprised, if one were to study old diaries and letters, that there would be many accounts of people committed to insane asylums or burned as witches for talking to people from the skies. In the Bible a blinding light came down from heaven, a voice spoke, and went away in a cloud of smoke, scorching all the ground about. It is described as a burning bush. I have always wondered how big that bush was anyhow? What of the world wide legends of people coming in a shining chariot out of the sky to teach a group of people or help them in a time of need? Why haven't scientists ever found the missing link, for which they search so desperately, to prove that man really does belong here?

As you can readily tell from the number of questions I have asked, I'm not trying to tell or convince anyone of anything. I am merely trying to seek a few answers myself. I don't know if this will

(Concluded on page 159)

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STORY BEHIND THE BACK COVER

By Robert Gibson Jones

MAY an artist have a few words about his work? Well, all right! I've been watching my covers appear recently in OTHER WORLDS and I've been of the firm opinion that there ought to be a slight description of the cover, at least, a small story, or even a larger one. Left hanging on their own merits, leaves them pictorially stranded with the whole responsibility, and it isn't quite fair. So I've expressed myself to editor Ray Palmer, and he's agreed that I'm right. I have a strong hunch that he has been impelled toward that agreement by letters from readers who said much the same thing.

However, since Ray hasn't had time to get organized as yet, I'll undertake to explain the cover you see this month on the rear of your (at least it's mine) favorite magazine. Not because OTHER WORLDS is the best, but because I'm something of a Ray Palmer fan.

First, these paintings were what I call "incidentals." They are things I doodle out in my spare time, but actually, they take more time than a painting which is done on order from a publisher. But they have one difference—these are painted the same size as the actual magazine cover. They are not painted twice size and then reduced. Reducing a painting ruins the original perspective and it just doesn't look like it's intended by the artist to look.

I begin an "incidental" by taking a small piece of drawing board cut to the size of the magazine. Then pour a couple of daubs of color on it, and let it run, turning it this way and that, and all the while observing it with a critical eye. When suddenly something seems to jump out at me and suggest something, I lay it down and begin to develop the suggestion.

A log of them just don't jell, and in that case I discard them. But sometimes I find myself with a concept I could hardly have drafted as well with a fixed previous idea in mind.

Actually this present cover reminds me of an old Paul cover, but those egg-shaped things are as incidental as the rest of the cover. I didn't know what was coming! It seems there is a lot of activity going on. Ships flying in the air, tanks rumbling along a causeway, preparations for a battle. Maybe the tanks are going to attack the egg-cities. Maybe they are going to aid the egg-cities to repel space ships. Maybe . . .

Well, maybe some author could have written quite a story about it, and I'm sorry he didn't. But Ray tells me that next month one of my covers (which is much more on the fantasy side than usual—personally I like fantasy better than science fiction to illustrate) was handed to Fritz Lieber and that it will appear with a story in the issue which will do a much better job of explaining what's going on than I could have. I'm quite anxious to see what he's done, because anybody who could write a story around *that* burping human volcano has my deepest respect. He must be a genius!

Thanks for listening, and thanks, Ray Palmer, for writing a story around the front cover of this issue. I kinda liked that cover, and I hope your engraver and printer don't do too much damage to my original. If it only weren't for that . . .

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Ah well, you can't have everything!

(Editor's note: We are going to try to have all back covers in the future either have a feature story in the issue, or an adequate feature explaining them. We have a story coming up by Jack Williamson, and another by Robert Bloch, for instance, either one of which will be a back cover. We think you'll like it.)

THE END

DINOSAUR DAY

(Concluded from Page 31)

"Oh," she said. "You told me the ice age made it too cold for them."

"Sure."

"I turned on the air conditioning in the Great Hall. I guess he froze to death. The poor thing was used to a hot climate."

"What do you know?" he said. "No wonder I had cold feet. Kiss me."

"You're standing on father," she said.

"Fine," said John.

THE END

MAN FROM TOMORROW

(Concluded from page 145)

greed to lust.

At the same time, the United States will be visited by a period of oratory that will be likened to the ancient Greek, and by the appearance of a score of brilliant scientists and inventors who will revolutionize our whole way of living. They will be impeded, however, by the war spirit constantly necessary because of the existence of Russia as a world power. Music will flourish in the United States and it will become the center of the music world.

The subject of the existence of Hitler in a hideout in Argentina will be broached to the Argentinian government, but will get nowhere. Worldwide opinion that Hitler escaped his doom in Berlin will grow until it will be freely admitted. There will be a consequent revival of warlike spirit, especially in East Berlin and the Soviet Sector, which will be, paradoxically, smashed by the Russians, who fear Hitler above all others. Their special fear will be an atomic attack on Russia from Argentina, led by Hitler himself. This fear will never be realized.

LETTERS

(Concluded from page 157)

be printed and frankly don't care a great deal. I have but two objects in mind in writing; one, to try and find some of these elusive answers; and two, to let you know how much I enjoy your magazine.

2624 East 6th Ave.
Spokane, Wash.

From now on you are our official defender. You have expressed us better than we could! As for the missing link, it just doesn't exist. In fact, trying to tie man into evolution has resulted in quite a fiasco—only too few people realize it. We science fiction readers know man came from the stars, don't we?

—Rap.

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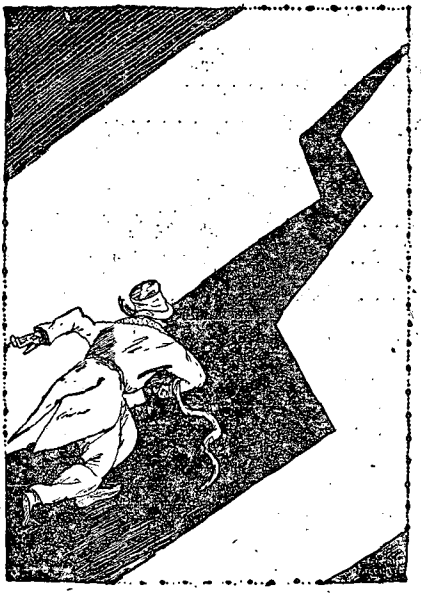

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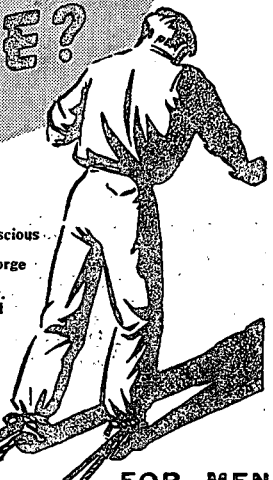

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